

Ambivalent Belonging in a Hierarchy of Others

Positioning and Identity-Making in Bucharest

Saskia Butler



Master's Thesis – Department of Social Anthropology

The University of Oslo

22.05.2012

Ambivalent Belonging in a Hierarchy of Others

Positioning and Identity-Making in Bucharest

Saskia Butler

© Saskia Butler

2012

Ambivalent Belonging in a Hierarchy of Others. *Positioning and Identity-Making in Bucharest*

Saskia Butler

<http://ww.duo.uio.no/>

Abstract

In this thesis I explore aspects of identity-making processes among city dwellers in Bucharest, Romania. The unbounded and fragmented cityscape appeared as ambiguous as the social context, where a lack of positively loaded sense of belonging prevailed. Within this ambiguous framework, categories of ‘Others’, proved to be vital for social orientation.

On the basis of five and a half months fieldwork in Bucharest, I suggest that ‘positioning’ in relations to ‘Others’, are significant aspects of identity-making processes among Bucharest dwellers, and in particular, the young middle class. ‘Others’ were represented in the social construct of ‘gypsies’, and categories of ill-mannered Romanians. These internal hierarchical orders also reflect a wider context, wherein Romanians subordinate themselves in relation to an idealized image of the West. Subjects and objects for disdain were saturated by notions of the ‘uncivilized’, contrasted, and compared to an idealized image of the ‘civilized West’. The common denominator that cut across various definitions of ‘Others’, both inferior ones in terms of ‘gypsies’, but also the superior one represented by the West, was this frequent reference to ideas of ‘civilized’ and ‘uncivilized’. This dichotomy, served as a navigator in identity-making processes, and was implemented by similarly positioned people to create a space where, positively loaded belonging emerged, while negative portrayals of ‘Others’ functioned to strengthen this sense of belonging.

Acknowledgements

First of all I wish to express my warmest gratitude to all of the persons whom generously welcomed me into their lives in Bucharest. I have never before been treated with such cordiality, kindness and sincerity. I owe special thanks to three wonderful Romanians. Thank you for offering me your friendships and for accepting my ignorance. Without your support, care and sense of humor I would have been lost in spirals of self-criticism and rumination. You sure know how to live, *vă mulțumesc pentru tot*.

I am indebted to my academic supervisor Paul Wenzel Geissler, whose sharp comments gave order to my thoughts, and whose encouragement and inspiration pushed me forwards; I could not have been more fortunate. I wish to express my gratitude to the Department of Social Anthropology in Oslo, and to all its dedicated professors who have cultivated my anthropological spirit throughout these five years. I owe thanks to Professor Vintilă Mihăilescu for his clever input, and for providing me with crucial insights about Romania.

I wish to thank my parents, Jenny Butler and Carl Gustafsson for always encouraging me, and for teaching me creative thinking, a vital tool in life, in the field and in the process of writing this thesis. I wish to express my gratitude to Peer, for patience, positivity and playfulness. A special thank to Nicole Rován, for Skype support and for visiting me in Bucharest.

Thanks to all of my wonderful and supportive classmates, and to my companion throughout the university years, Tina Svedberg. I am also immensely grateful for bright and critical inputs by Peder Fischer-Griffiths and Betina Torbjørnsen.

Reality is multifaceted and inexhaustible, but I have tried my uttermost to provide an accurate account and analysis of people and events in the field. Any possible shortcomings with the aim of doing so are nevertheless fully mine. Accomplishing the fieldwork and writing this thesis has been a demanding, yet amazing experience. I have learnt a lot, and hope that I may transmit some of these insights to the reader.

Contents

Abstract	V
Acknowledgements	VII
Contents	VIII
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Topic and Research Question.....	2
Theoretical and Analytical Framework.....	3
Identity-Making.....	3
Positioning and Orientation.....	4
Differentiation and Belonging.....	4
Methodology	7
An Unwanted Observer	8
Informants and Production of Data	10
Drawing Fieldnotes	11
Historical and Geographical Context	12
Bucharest “Micul Paris”	14
Ethical Reflections	15
Thesis Outline	15
Chapter 2: An Urban Patchwork	19
Analytical Framework: Space, Place and Identity	19
Arenas.....	21
Urban Networking: ‘Being Found’	22
Bucharest.....	25
Disorganization and Property	27
Mihai	29
Marcel.....	30
Herăstrău: the Old and the New	31
Concluding Remarks	33
Chapter 3: The Gypsy Other	35
Analytical Framework.....	35
Who are the ‘Gypsies’?	36
A Brief History.....	38

Gypsy Criteria	39
Gypsies in Romanian Self-Perception.....	41
The confusion of two extremes	42
Romanian Racism: “Your shit is worse than our shit”	43
Gypsies are our Problem	44
An Ambiguous Warning	46
Bad Gypsies/Bad Romanians	48
Racism as Commonsense	49
Oana	50
Dogs and Gypsies: Manifestations of Embodied Prejudice	51
A Walk Through Sintești.....	52
Afterthoughts.....	53
A Manifestation.....	54
Concluding Remarks	55
Chapter 4: Romanian Self-Contempt	56
Self-Contempt and Self-Conception	57
Romanians in the World.....	57
Dreams of the West.....	60
Cheating	63
National Belonging	65
Civilized and Uncivilized.....	68
Concluding Remarks	71
Chapter 5: The Romanian Other	72
Contextualizing Distinctions	72
Manele.....	73
Cocalari	75
Interpreting Manele	78
The Fear of ‘Manelization’	81
Millionaire Club	82
The Lăutar and the Manelist.....	84
Authenticity and an Appealing Image.....	87
Concluding Remarks	88
Concluding Reflections	89

Linking Localities	91
Epilogue	93
Bibliography	96
Web Pages and Electronic Media.....	98

Chapter 1: Introduction

Chill degrees lay densely above thick layers of ice covering the pavement of Bulevardul Regina Elisabeta, along which I was dragging two enormous suitcases at the date of my arrival. Despite my short pre-visit, I felt rather lost where the airport bus had dropped me. I made a few unsuccessful attempts to communicate with the red-nosed booksellers, quivering by their temporary stalls lined up in front of the University building. I was somehow familiar with central Bucharest and knew that I was standing at the Universitate Square, where the Golaniad¹ protest took place in 1990. What I did not know was that Universitate can be seen as the hub from where the city center unfolds. Following the broad Bulevardul General Gheorghe Magheru both North and South, one finds several of Bucharest's other main locations such as Piața Romană, Piața Victoriei and to the South, Piața Unirii.

The image of the frozen city that took me in that January afternoon is distant yet clear in my memory, contrasting strongly to the hot and humid summer city that I left in July. I had made a two-day visit the previous October during a European Union conference on Roma integration issues, when I was instantly fascinated with the incoherent urban environment, a result of Ceausescu's outrageous interference in the architectural harmony of the city. This first acquaintance with Bucharest solidified my decision on conducting the fieldwork in the capital. The urban congregation of various and at times contrasting symbols, histories and people were characteristics that motivated my return. This confusing hub did undeniably obstruct my search for informants and data at times, but I cannot stress enough the value of the inescapable multiplicity of information Bucharest has to offer a fresh researcher.

I had come to Bucharest the first time to gain insights about the European political climate on Roma issues. My wish was initially, to find the incentive for going 'someplace' in a topic born out of a lived experience in my everyday surroundings in Oslo. Spurred by the seemingly increasing flow of Eastern European Roma in Norway, I decided to trace the migration of this minority back to the outset of their travels. Hence, I initiated this study as an exploration of the racist discourse directed specifically towards Roma minority, which appeared to flourish among Romanians in Bucharest. As I ventured into this thematic, I did soon enough realize the flat character of its conclusion, 'that many Romanians have racist

¹ Protest with the purpose of preventing ex-members of the Communist Party to participate in the first election after the Romanian Revolution in 1990

views'. Parallel to this discovery, interview-like conversations and situations with informants served to introduce a new set of loaded discourses, which proved to deepen and extend the focus of my study.

Topic and Research Question

Conversations regarding Roma minority, which evolved around a concept of 'gypsies' /*țigani*², were commonly followed by a general discussion on life in Romania. The latter topic often carried a trait of negativity, which revealed a seemingly low self-perception, in terms of national belonging among my Romanian informants. I was often warned of being robbed, cheated and lied to by 'gypsies', but almost as frequently was I warned of being robbed, cheated and lied to by Romanians. My subjective experience of living in Romania was, however, the complete reverse. I had in comparison to previous travels, never felt as safe and cared for as in Bucharest. I experienced it as if the people I met had been preserved in a jar filled with a calm, old-fashioned politeness, generosity and hospitality. Nowhere did I meet the brutal and dishonest Romanian that people so often portrayed.

Hitherto, I have already presented two conflicting narratives. Firstly, the similarity in descriptions of two otherwise differentiated groups, Romanians and Roma. Further, these narratives seen in contrast to my own experience of Romania. This, I argue introduces a third relationship to the field of positioning, which is a loosely defined image of the West, as a scale in relation to which Romania was portrayed by informants. This scale, as an abstract ideal, proved to play a significant part in Romanian identity making.

My aim is to examine the inter-linkage of these topics, embedded in the characteristics of Bucharest's cityscape, in terms of an amorphous entity of fragmented, but nevertheless shared, identity. Like the cityscape's disjointed appearance, the ideologies and ideas of its inhabitants appeared somehow contradictory. In this thesis I am inquiring *how we can understand aspects of identity-making processes in Bucharest*. I am proposing the act of 'positioning', in relation to one or more 'Others', represented in topics, places and people, to be an intrinsic part in these processes.

² A further discussion and explanation of the "gypsy concept" will be held in chapter 3

Theoretical and Analytical Framework

I am mainly dealing with three discourses, the one of self-perception, ideas and stances in relation to Roma minority and thirdly a category I understand as the Romanian ‘Other’.

Surrounding these prevails the loosely defined and idealized image of the “civilized West”, as an inevitable and superior scale for comparison. Although I am attempting to make sense of a set of recurring discourses, I do not perceive these as determined in any way, nor as coherent, as one of my main interests is to portray social life as characterized by disorder and flux (Barth, 1994: 15). I will be discussing these relationships further throughout the thesis, but initially I wish to present scholars that have been useful for my analysis, and set a theoretical framework that indicates my outlook on the matters that these discourses evolve around.

Identity-Making

The three discourses I am focusing on, and the notions and norms that they entail, have implications for self-perception, and are therefore also components of identity-making processes among my informants. The thinking about identity has developed since it first became an anthropological topic in the 1960s and 1970s, and has throughout later decades been processed, reformed and questioned with regards to its usefulness. I have found the sociologist Richard Jenkins’ *Social Identity* (2005), which stems from scholars important to the field, such as Fredrik Barth, George Herbert Mead and Erving Goffman, to be a useful contribution on this matter. Jenkins suggests that the socially constructed and experienced world may be understood in terms of three orders, the individual order, the interaction order, and the institutional order. These three orders concern the internal (inside the heads of embodied individuals), interaction between people, and the founded patterns of how things are supposed to be carried out (Jenkins, 2005: 17). Further, these are entangled, concurrent, and thereby nearly inseparable. Thereby, ‘selfhood’ should not be viewed as an isolated unit, but as a part of social processes. My thesis is based on themes and topics that seemed to preoccupy many of the people that I met in the field, and which were also significant to their self-perception. Further, stances in relation to these topics were commonly legitimized by arguments built on historical, societal, normative notions and concepts. Therefore, the act of positioning oneself is indeed a highly social process.

Positioning and Orientation

My overall emphasis is thus, the importance of ‘positioning’ in a society caught in a tenacious phase of transition, with reference to the demise of communism. I am not assessing the importance of positioning oneself to be less in other places, but I am interested in the contextual causes for its significance, and the specifics of its character in Bucharest, Romania. When speaking of positioning I am referring to acts intended, consciously or unconsciously, by actors to place themselves in a range of possible preferences. In doing so my informants applied widely distributed and generally recognized markers (for those involved), in relation to which aversion and approval were tools in identity-making processes. What I am dealing with here, are a range of categories central to identity-making, but more important is that certain stances to these categories represent a way of positioning rather than the static character that ‘identification’ implies (Eriksen, 2010: 71). Positioning carries the significance of direction, a trajectory and does not primarily decide the terminus of the act which identity may reflect. I therefore perceive ‘orientation’ to be a key word for understanding these processes. My informants made their stances in relation to various phenomena, and in order to legitimize their position grasped for both, contemporary as well as more established notions and norms, such as the recurrent idea of the civilized and uncivilized. Ada Engebrigtsen’s study from a Transylvanian village, *Exploring Gypsiness* (2007), has been of vital importance for my understanding of the mutually constituent relations between the Romanian majority population and Roma minority. Engebrigtsen’s point regarding ‘gypsies’ significance for Romanian collective identity was repeatedly verified throughout my fieldwork. Engebrigtsen emphasizes that the Romanian discourse of civilization is crucial for understanding how ethnic groups, and nation states are understood and ranked in Romania (Engebrigtsen, 2007). Ideas of civilized and uncivilized reappeared in the statements of my informants, and proved to constitute important markers in their ordering of the world. These ideas could be applied to individuals, groups and nation states, and gave the impression of being linked to Romanian self-perception, in an internalized acceptance of the perception of Romania as having a subordinated position in a “civilization ladder” (Engebrigtsen, 2007: 26).

Differentiation and Belonging

“Similarity and difference are the touchstones of human social identity, which positions us with respect to all other people” (Jenkins, 2002: 117). The activity of differentiation was a

central tool for orientation among my informants, wherein ‘Others’ and ‘otherness’ were fundamental for their ordering of the world. These ‘Others’ appeared both as outcomes and instruments in the quest for orientation, rather than clear a strategy of exclusion and inclusion. I view positioning, in terms of stances taken by informants in relation to certain topics, places and people. Further, Jenkins’s talks of an ongoing and dynamic relationship between identification as a social process, and identity as its product (Jenkins, 2002: 118). The act of positioning oneself may thereby be related to the social process of identification, but as this is, in my view, an ongoing and continuous process, I do not approach identity as a product, and do not assume this to be Jenkins explicit intention either.

Bourdieu’s *Distinction* (2010) has been a relevant starting point, when thinking about differentiation in Bucharest. The cityscape appears somehow floating, as clear borders delimiting class distinctions are almost absent in Bucharest. The maintenance of class boundaries was thereby carried out socially and discursively, and the urge for doing so was expressed strongly by my middle class informants. Matters of taste in relation to who to socialize with, what music to listen to, and what places to affiliate oneself to, were important markers in identity-making. Although, taste constitutes a vital tool for establishing one’s position, Romania does somehow contradict the French class structure that Bourdieu bases his theory on. Communism provided a rupture in Romanian society, a “radical overturning”, a convulsion, wherein those who benefited moved upwards, while others descended in the system (Boia, 2001a: 111). Katherine Verdery, the pioneer anthropologist in Eastern Europe, does, however, stress that ethnic and class boundaries were maintained and emphasized during Communism, through the second economy where connections and contacts were vital for accessing benefits (Verdery, 1996: 84, 86). It is therefore difficult to settle how viscous the pre-Communist class structures have proven to be. I do however acknowledge the rupture that Communism brought forth, in viewing class to be more of a precarious category in Romania, than in for example France.

The actual conveyance of preferred trajectories activates a social motive of the act. So, more than playing a role individually, positioning creates an experience of belonging among those that share preferences. I approach ‘belonging’ in terms of Anthony Cohen’s concept referred to in Jenkins, as “the shared *sense* of belonging” or membership, to be essential to social identification (Jenkins, 2002: 118). In Romania I did however observe a general lack of thereof, or a scarcity of positively loaded belonging between citizens. My material does

somehow contradict common ideas of how national sentiments are shaped. Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (2006), has been a useful guide when reflecting on the seeming absence of positively loaded nationalist sentiments in the context, which has inspired me to question the forcefulness of the nation state in the imaginations of my informants. Dissociation from, for example, uncivilized Romanians and rurality did somehow create a platform for belonging. This discursive stage was embodied in particular arenas such as libraries, clubs and cafés, appearing like islands in the cityscape, where likeminded gathered.

I would like to note that, although I speak of preferences in terms of activities and places, I do not consider these to be held in a complete creative freedom of choice. The assumption that people construct their realities does not necessarily imply that there are no limitations in this project (Barth, 1994: 10). It is therefore necessary to acknowledge and include impacts of material and social realities on the practices that are in focus. I perceive that choices and preferences are being created in an intricate structure of already made differences and similarities, involving many layers of social strata. Class is, nevertheless, especially hard to grasp and trace in a young urban milieu, where identity is communicated simply as a matter of "lifestyle", as this image easily masks the actual origins of persons. My main informant group, which I will account for in depth in chapter two, defined themselves largely as middle class. More relevant, however, are the discourses and the practices that served to maintain this identification. Bourdieu's concept of 'capital' and 'habitus', are fruitful when discussing class relations in this context. The relevance of Bourdieu concerning these matters is that he transfers power to non-economic and non-political spheres of society through the concepts of cultural and social capital (Bugge, 2002: 248). As I have mentioned earlier, middle class is somewhat of a precarious category in Romania, in particular with regards to the global financial crisis, which affected the aspiring middle class and some of my informants harshly. Another factor that contributes to the precariousness of middle class is the general absence of class boundaries in Bucharest's cityscape. 'Habitus', bodily dispositions of knowledge, characteristics and style, that is, the cultural capital of an individual, are therefore of much importance to the middle class for maintaining identity (Bugge, 2002: 225).

My focus is not, however, exclusively on the middle class, but differentiation at large, saturated by a sense of unsettlement that I observed in Bucharest. I see that Romania still is in a transitional process following the fall of communism in 1989 and the gradual transformation

into a time of liberal governance. Romania has converted from a totalitarian and seemingly classless society, characterized by censorship and restrictions on creativity, into a reality where individual choices seem possible and the importance of these in achieving a sense of belonging in a hierarchical system not fully articulated. My argument rests on my perception of Romania as a place where social structures are experienced to be under construction. Whether these structures are indeed developing or are, on the contrary, static, is less important than the experienced flow of categories and concepts wherein the urge for positioning becomes important to actors. This is in turn linked to the arbitrariness of belonging as a matter of choice, and taste as a tool for determining positions in life. I wish to emphasize that rather than being determinant, preferences serve to express an aim, instead of the actual outcome, of that wish. Moreover, the significance of positioning is more than what may seem to be an individual choice. It is also a social act, which provides some sort of belonging in the experienced flow.

Methodology

I conducted the fieldwork over a time span of five and a half months, arriving Bucharest in January and leaving in July 2011. My idea was to study belonging and livelihood strategies among the impoverished Roma, who constitute the majority population in a marginalized suburb called Ferentari. The plan I had set out would eventually prove itself to be close to an impossible mission due to language difficulties and a general disinterest of local NGOs. This realization came parallel to my growing curiosity for the discourses that would lead to my new focus.

I spent the first weeks in Bucharest searching for an apartment and enrolling in a language school. Romanian is a Latin idiom with a grammatical structure far more complicated than, for instance, French or Spanish. Thirty percent of the vocabulary is of Slavic origin, an idiomatic branch I was unfamiliar with at the time. I would eventually come to learn basic Romanian through an evening course, with classes twice a week during the first two months of the fieldwork. The majority of my informants did however speak intermediate or excellent English, which is fairly common among the Bucharest youth.

With the help of Felix, whom I had met during the European Union conference the previous October, I found a small studio apartment located off the Dacia Boulevard, close to

the centrally situated Piața Romană. Felix dismissed my plan to settle in the notorious Ferentari area without further ado. According to him, Ferentari was not an option for somebody like me, and being a newcomer I had no choice but to take his advice. The Dacia area, however, is considered to be one of the nicer ones in the city center, with a mix of residential and commercial buildings, beautiful villas and embassies. The neighborhood hosts residents of lower and upper middle class, but, just as anywhere in Bucharest, many of the forlorn properties are inhabited by squatters.

When settled, I initiated correspondence with local NGOs, primarily with those who ran projects in Ferentari, and which I had got acquainted with during the conference the previous October. I met with representatives and activists and attended relevant events and debates. Within a few weeks, I had mapped the most prominent NGOs and personalities within the world of Roma integration and rights in Romania, which was when I realized the small scale of this type of organizational activity. Many NGOs expressed their interest at first, but seldom followed up the conversation.

An Unwanted Observer

In addition to self-critical reflections regarding my role as a foreign observer, people I met in the field also questioned my presence. During a meeting with a professor in linguistics and the founder of one of the biggest Roma rights organizations in Romania, the silence of the NGO's became more intelligible. A young anthropology student called Andrei, whom I had met in the library described professor Serban as, "*The Martin Luther King of the Roma*". Serban was known to proudly flaunt her Roma identity by wearing traditional long skirts and other ethnic attributes. I managed to arrange a meeting with her thanks to Mr. Lazar, a Romanian Rom whom I had become good friends with in Oslo. After persistence on my part, Serban invited me to her office where she would introduce me to a social worker responsible for the organization's project in Ferentari.

The sun shone into the small office where Serban sat by a big oval table. Cosmin, the social worker was absent, instead there were two young girls looking up at me from the rear end of the table. Serban introduced them: "this is Maria and she studies French and this is Alina, she studies English. They are both Roma and they are here to discuss with us". Although the girls faced me with a smile, I could not help but feeling observed. Serban

explained that Cosmin was busy, but that Maria worked in the project led by the organization. Serban commenced the conversation: "We are of course grateful for the interest shown by foreign researchers, but I also think that it is a little bit irritating that people come here to study Roma" (Serban emphasized "little" so that the word appeared as the opposite of it's literal implication). I replied that I intended to avoid the mistake of exoticizing my informants, adding, "I am simply here to learn." Professor Serban interrupted me, explaining that she had skimmed through my research proposal and that she imagined it difficult to retrieve any useful data in Ferentari, because of language and culture barriers. "Even if you come to Ferentari with an interpreter," she pointed at one of the girls, "people may not speak the truth or even wish to speak with you at all." I admitted that I had anticipated such challenges, whereby she countered: "So why didn't you study Roma in Norway then?" I felt more and more cornered as I was interrogated in statistics and research on the subject in Scandinavia. Serban brought forth her opinions on what my aims should be, which was to better the situation for the marginalized. In the proposal I had sent to Serban I had clearly questioned the relevance of ethnicity in Ferentari and expressed my wish to focus on identity and survival strategies in the area. Serban appeared to have overlooked this, and concluded: "Roma in Ferentari are not Roma in a cultural sense so if you wish to make a study in Ferentari it should be about abandonment in relation to the state and the world". She gave me the number to the social worker: "He is in your age, he will like you, and Maria here can help you as a guide and translator, in exchange for a salary of course. I am not talking astronomical amounts but you have to pay her! I am myself very busy and had it not been for my good friend Mr. Lazar I had never, NEVER answered your email". I stumbled out of the office red faced, with sweat dripping from my forehead.

Cosmin who was managing the project in Ferentari answered one of my calls but I never heard back from him a second time. I met up with Mr. Stefan, another prominent Roma spokesperson and academic, for an interview the same week. The moment we sat down by the table he explained that he was short of time, whereby he asked me whether I was aware that anthropological material has been used in warfare. I had known this since my first semester at university; with this knowledge I could not, however, alter inequalities in the world, nor the fact that I came from a privileged country and an institution providing me with the power to define. Being humble and honest could not smooth over the fact that I was in Bucharest to define aspects of Romanian society. The encounter with Serban, the general disinterest of

NGOs and the way I was approached by the Roma spokesperson made me accept the fact that I appeared as a threat or perhaps redundant to the community of Roma activists.

Informants and Production of Data

While my role as a foreign researcher appeared to obstruct access to Ferentari, it paradoxically provoked other types of information. I frequently found myself in a repetitive type of conversation with people I met in my everyday life. The topic discussed came simply as a consequence of the question: “*What are you doing here?*” Not only did the topic “Roma minority” unleash a flood of data on Bucharest dwellers’ views on “gypsies”, it also exposed their perceptions of Romania and Romanians. My first informants were thus, persons in my surroundings, such as taxi drivers, neighbors and new acquaintances. One of my main points in chapter two, where I will provide a lengthy description of Bucharest and my methodology, is that I repeatedly experienced being “found” or “spotted” by informants. These were predominately middle class people between their mid twenties and mid thirties, belonging to my main group of focus.

Intentionally I have chosen not to distinguish between key informants and informants, due to their complementary significance to my overall understanding. I will explain the nature of these relationships and the circumstances around them throughout the thesis, and, further, the implications they had for the information I was given. In order to give a somewhat structured outline of my informants by way of introduction, I will present people within three groups that roughly reflect the way in which we related to each other.

The first group consists of those whom I met on a daily or weekly basis, during unstructured and friendly circumstances. They were either students or professionals, and some of them knew each other from before or became acquainted through me. These people do, to a great extent, share interests and aspirations, which in turn brought them to the same social arenas in Bucharest. The second group consists of people who are not necessarily interlinked in terms of interests and arenas. These are for example my neighbor, my landlady, and contacts from events, and young students. The third informant group is linked to spaces outside of central Bucharest and beyond my main informant group. Accounts from these people and places serve to strengthen the relevance of my topics outside of the physical urban borders. I spent about two afternoons per week during the last two months of the fieldwork,

teaching art at a school for impoverished children in Ferentari. I will be referring to situations, related to the school and the area. Further I made about five trips outside of Bucharest, one to Iași in northern Romania, two to Transylvania and the rests to the nearby home villages of several informants.

Although participant observation is regarded the ultimate method of ethnographic research (Stewart, 1998: 6), this technique was not always possible in Bucharest. A capital city does not offer the same possibilities for practicing a technique, which was initially formed for studies of smaller communities (Caldeira, 2000:11). A focus on one particular neighborhood would possibly have made participant observation more accessible, but since my study is about a general unsettlement reflected in discourses on “others”, such a strategy would have been inadequate. Following my informants in their everyday chores was not an option, as most of them were busy working or studying. Participant observation did, however, become more viable as I extended my network, and was eventually able to join social events on a daily basis. Although, I circulated chiefly in the central parts of Bucharest, the fieldwork may be characterized as itinerant, which I claim to be a necessity for developing an understanding of the interconnectedness of neighborhoods. Also, in order to gain insights about positioning, one ought to move about. I have drawn several points in this thesis from a range of semi-structured and unstructured interviews. I would take notes openly during these encounters, after having made sure that the informant in question felt comfortable with my scribbling.

Drawing Fieldnotes

Especially during the first part of the fieldwork, I felt overwhelmed by the thought of making sense of data that appeared incoherent, in an environment new to me. At the time, writing felt as a flat representation of my impressions, and an insufficient method for capturing something that seemed so fragmented and unclear. When neither thinking nor writing seemed to interconnect my observations, I started drawing. These abstract sketches were not meant as fieldnotes at first, but while observing them I recognized my disjointed impressions of the field put together in a cohesive manner. The pictures were still complex and fragmented, but more logical. Being new in the field, it is easily done to hamper one’s perception by searching for forms or concepts that make sense from the start, instead of lingering in the unknown. Drawing helped me to let go of the need to evaluate everything I experienced and linger in the

unexplainable a little longer. I view this as a form of methodological liminal phase. Drawing as a method helped me preserve impressions I could not understand or write down at the time. These imprints linger in my drawings, which have been useful tools for remembering observations in the process of writing the thesis.

Historical and Geographical Context

The Carpathians and the Danube have historically been perceived as “the lines of resistance of the Romanian space” (Boia, 2001a: 59). The phrase, “From the Dniester to the Tisza”, is familiar to most Romanians, and expresses the ideal boundaries of Romania (Boia, 2001a: 59). Although the banks of the Dniester are predominately Hungarian, rivers are, according to Romanian historian Lucian Boia, viewed as natural borders, dividing Romanians from ‘Others’ (Boia, 2001a: 59).

Eastern Romania borders the Black Sea, and in northeast Ukraine, Moldova, and in northwest, Hungary, Serbia, and Bulgaria in the south. Romanians would often tell me that, “*We are Latin,*” and therefore warmer and more hospitable than other Eastern Europeans. The areas that are now Romania, have been the stage for many battles, and subjugated various empires, such as the Roman, the Ottoman, and the Austrian-Hungarian. A general concern with origins appeared to be a common trait among Romanians I met. Romanian is a Latin language, in the midst of an area of Slavic speaking countries, with a name carrying the legacy of the Roman Empire. Renaissance historians assumed Romanians to be the successors of the Romans. At the time, Romanians did, however, affiliate themselves with Slavonic culture, and to the East with reference to Orthodoxy in relation to the Western and Catholic part of Europe (Boia, 2001a: 31). In the seventeenth century, contemporary Romanian historians detected impinging similarities between Romanian and Latin, and settled that all Romanians originated from Rome (Boia, 2001a: 31). This myth of origin, which was emphasized by informants as, “*We are Latin,*” appears to linger in notions of Romanian identity.

The Kingdom of Romania was declared in 1859, when the principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia were tied under the leadership of Prince Alexander Ioan Cuza. Shortly thereafter, Romania gained independence from the Ottoman Empire and international recognition. The areas of Bessarabia, Transylvania and Bukovina became part of the

Kingdom in the later stages of World War I. The mid-war period that followed meant prosperity and development, an era commonly spoken of in sentimental manners by Romanians, “*Romania had all the opportunities to become a successful nation like the Scandinavian countries*” (Petrus, a young student).

Pre-Communist Romania had a fairly small élite, and left-wing sympathies were nearly absent among the predominately rural population. Romanian society was therefore somewhat unprepared for the most rigid interpretation of communism, which was to be implemented (Boia, 2001a: 112). The Communist People's Republic was declared in 1947 when the communist party won rather precarious elections, and King Michael I, was forced to abdicate. The notorious dictator Nicolae Ceaușescu, seized power in 1965 and extended his rule throughout the eighties, when the oppression peaked with means such as the “Securitate” police agency.

The Romanian revolution that took place in 1989, consisted of a series of uprisings that culminated with the execution of Ceaușescu and his wife Elena. There was however, no clear political transition in the aftermath of the riots. The Golaniad protest was organized in May 1990, and was initiated by intellectuals to prevent former members of the Communist Party from participating in the first elections following the revolution. The peaceful protest was put down violently by supporters of the Frontul Salvării Naționale (National Salvation Front), which had seized power over main institutions and national media. There are therefore evident reasons to discuss whether former members of the party may be seen as having “hijacked” the revolution. The FSN, which consisted mainly of ex-communists, including its leader Ion Iliescu, organized and won the elections in 1990. Verdery argues that suffering caused under the Communist regime has been a source for gaining political capital, visibility and respect before and after the revolution. Iliescu, who portrayed himself as a victim of the former regime capitalized on his degradation under Ceaușescu’s rule to win people’s sympathy and approval (Verdery, 1996: 107). In the post-socialistic years, Romania has rapidly drawn closer to the west, by joining NATO in 2004, and becoming a member of the European Union in 2007. As will be shown in the thesis, informants commonly expressed resignation and a sense of alienation in relation to political courses of events. The current regime and politicians were often referred to as corrupt and populist, and many explained that the only way to take control over one’s destiny was simply to leave the country.

Bucharest “Micul Paris”

The Romanian word *București* is related to the Romanian word for joy, ‘*bucurie*,’ and the name of the capital could therefore be translated as “the city of joy” (Boia, 2001a: 266). Inhabitants would sometimes refer to their city as “Micul Paris” (“The Little Paris”), a name that seemed to invoke a certain pride among the city dwellers. As I mentioned in the introduction, the city may be seen as unfolding from the University Square, which in reality was a haphazard outcome of the crossing of the major boulevards, leaving the University as the hub of the city center (Boia, 2001a: 279). The Dacia area, where I lived, was located in walking distance to Piața Romană, from where I could catch the metro, or walk to other main sites. The location was convenient, as my main informant group moved predominately in the central parts of the city. Here, I aim to portray the historical changes that the city has undergone, while a further outline of my informants’ movements and of the cityscape will be provided in the following chapter.

The capital of Romania hosts about two million of the country’s total population of nearly twenty-two million. Bucharest is located close to the southern border, revealing its past as the capital of Wallachia (Boia, 2001a: 265). The cityscape, which is characterized by its eclectic composition of communist blocks, and ornate Parisian style houses, was once a large forest. This picture is hard to imagine, with regards to its contemporary state of noisy traffic, asphalt and concrete high-rises. Bucharest has gone through a series of radical changes throughout its lifetime. Historical monuments and buildings have been wiped out due to an unsteady history, but also as an outcome of an “unstable behavior” (Boia, 2001a: 274). Before the 17th century, Bucharest’s inhabitants lived predominately on ground level, the absence of houses with more than one floor, and scattered settlements, interrupted by gardens and orchards made the capital appear like a large village. The Ottomans made their mark, according to their fashion, during the 18th century, extending the squares and the streets, and providing taverns with verandahs (Boia, 2001a: 270-271). Bucharest acquired the alias “Micul Paris”, or Little Paris, during the modernization that took place during the 19th century. Numerous houses and buildings were designed either by French architects or their Romanian apprentices during the later decades of the century (Boia, 2001a: 274). Many of these impressive building are to be seen along the Calea Victoriei Street, such as the Romanian Atheneum and the Military Club.

The Communist era may be ranked as the supreme period of urban reformation. As a result of enforced industrialization during the 1950s, Bucharest's population increased quickly. The congestion was solved by reforming the villages that surrounded the capital into suburbs, with infinite lines of identical concrete high-rises (Boia, 2001a: 287). Many of my informants grew up in these areas, such as Militar and Pantelimon. They shared an ambivalence of ill feelings as well as warm sentimentality over their childhoods in these concrete neighborhoods. Following the earthquake in 1977, Ceaușescu found a reason to create a new Bucharest. He decided to restructure the entire city, in addition to demolishing and rebuilding, more or less on top of the old one (Boia, 2001a: 288). Big parts of the historical center were demolished, old monasteries and churches wiped out, and its inhabitants were forced to relocate to give space for Ceaușescu's massive Palace to be built. I will return to the implications the presence of this immense monument of Communist times has for the inhabitants of Bucharest in chapter two.

Ethical Reflections

In an urban setting characterized by hasty encounters, and where one's social network is constituted by multiple relationships, some which are close and others distant, it is not always appropriate or even possible to inform those around you that you are observing and memorizing what they say and do. My closer contacts were well aware of my project, which does not imply that they knew what the actual outcome of it would be like, and neither did I at the time. I have therefore tried communicating my thoughts with my closer informants throughout the writing process. I have taken all possible precautions by anonymising individuals by name and professions. I have not been as sensitive with the locations where I dwelt since they were most often public, or sites appropriated by bigger crowds.

Thesis Outline

Following is a presentation of the chronological order I have found most suitable for the purpose of my conclusion. I intend for each chapter to set a framework for the following chapter, which explains my choice of opening with a chapter on Bucharest's cityscape. This chapter will serve as an extensive introduction of the people and places relevant to my study. I aim to identify the character of the cityscape and the potential in examining its affiliation with

the discourses I encountered in it. The main goal with this chapter is to describe the fragmentation and the tensions within which the discourses that will be discussed in following chapters, are taking form. Firstly, I intend to describe how the incoherence of the cityscape serves to communicate repressed knowledge of the past. Due to Ceaușescu's tactless interventions in the architectural harmony of the city, every other house represents a different era. Secondly, I wish to portray the ways in which my informants moved and presented specific arenas in the city. Their preferences were commonly saturated with some sort of modern, sophisticated and international character, which is to be found in most metropolises. The exclusion of local music, food and arts, was a consistent trait in the orientation of my middle class informants.

In chapter three I will immerse myself in the easily accessed 'gypsy' discourse, and the topic that sprung out of these conversations, expressions of self-contempt among Romanians that is. By presenting extracts from interviews and interaction I will explain how Romanians relate to their 'gypsy other', and this category's for Romanian collective identity.

In chapter four I will direct my focus towards Romanian self-contempt, a feature that I found to be particularly puzzling, initially. The aim of the chapter is chiefly, to dissect the discourse of the general negative self-perception I observed, and to create an understanding of notions and ideas that support this tendency. I intend further, to explore the interconnectedness of Romanian self-perception with the racist discourse, discussed in previous chapter.

The relevance of positioning will appear especially relevant when introducing the concept of the 'Romanian other'. In chapter five, I will present conversations concerning the music genre *manele*³ and a loosely defined category of people, *cocalari*. The aim is to present how positioning takes form and how it becomes important in practice. Through presenting empirical material, such as situations and conversations, regarding *manele* and *cocalari*, I will illustrate how these are used as objects for disdain among my young middle class informants. I will illustrate how the *cocalari*, which was described as the epitome of an ill-mannered person, becomes an additional 'Other' in the context, a category in relation to which my informants distanced themselves. In this chapter I will study an identity hierarchy, with 'gypsies' representing the lowest, the *cocalari* on the second tier, the negative self-image of

³ A contemporary Romani music genre which carries Oriental and Balkan influences

Romania/Romanians on the third tier and, at the top the idealized Western countries. I base this discussion on my informants' usage of oppositions like uncivilized/civilized, unhygienic/hygienic and uneducated/educated, when explaining life in Romania, and Romania in the world. Notions about authenticity and morality were equally important markers when evaluating one's stance in relation to topics and categories.



Ceaușescu's Palace from above (<http://www.mycontinent.co/Romania.php>)



Mihai Vodă Monastery, a symbol of Bucharest. The church was fortunately spared during the demolishing to make way for Ceaușescu's Palace. It was moved about two hundred meters, and hidden from view behind communist high-rises (<http://bucharest.romaniaexplorer.com>)

Chapter 2: An Urban Patchwork

When reflecting on people and situations important to my overall understanding of my research topic, the presence of Bucharest as an amorphous place of collective identity becomes essential. Like the city's incoherent structure, the ideologies and ideas of its inhabitants appeared contradictory and rather ambivalent. My aim in this chapter is to provide an introduction of people and places relevant to my study, hence I am characterizing this part as an extended place and context description, with methodological implications. Here, I aim to identify the character of the cityscape and highlight the potential of examining its affiliation with discourses about gypsies, Romanians and several other topics that I encountered in Bucharest. A common denominator for these discourses is more or less explicit and ambivalent notions of the 'civilized' or 'civilization', and stances in relation to these. Fragmentation, flux and tensions are significant features of the cityscape, within which these discourses are taking form.

Firstly, I intend to describe arenas relevant to my study, the ways I got acquainted with people, and how my informants moved and presented specific arenas in the city. Secondly, I wish to depict how the incoherence of the cityscape serves to communicate the past, and how the past lingers in contemporary appropriations of the city. Thirdly, I will examine the ways in which current appropriations of buildings and places reveal contemporary issues and strivings to define one's belonging in a context of flux. Here, the disparities, which constitute actual realities in Romania, cannot be disregarded. These three points are meant to provide an introduction and framework for the following chapters.

Analytical Framework: Space, Place and Identity

The concepts of space/place have primarily been shaped by human geographers during the 1980s, with scholars such as Doreen Massey and David Harvey featuring prominently in the discussions. The rethinking of space has further been bound up with a broader context of reconceptualization, identities in particular, which commonly are approached as constituted through and in engagements with interactional practices (Massey, 2004:5). As I have already stated in the introductory chapter, I wish to leave behind the idea of identities as static and grounded, in exchange for an approach focusing on their continuous and changing nature. Further, I wish to align with Massey's reasoning regarding space as equally relational as the

concepts of place and identities, and with her ideas regarding temporality. For space/temporality/becoming to exist, they are necessarily permeated by temporality (Massey, 2004). Temporality is thus, what enables trajectories, and accordingly space should not be viewed as a surface, but as a simultaneity of stories up to the present (Massey, accessed 2012-03-10: 4).

Massey's reasoning regarding the temporality of space becomes particularly relevant with regards to my focus on identity-making, as ambivalent and ongoing processes, entangled in unbounded places and spatialities. Considering Bucharest as constructed through and in interaction, so too are the relational spaces, in which identities are communicated, essentially unbound, yet significant in identity-making processes among my informants. I am referring here to my informants' outlooks, which were partly "placed" in the context of Bucharest, but also, essentially, global. This global sense of place appeared in terms of references retrieved beyond the city, and became relevant when positioning Bucharest in the world, and when positioning oneself in Bucharest. The main example of such a reference point were notions of civilized/uncivilized, which had various and sometimes contrasting significance, but did nevertheless constitute an important marker in informants' quests for orientation in this peculiar setting.

Following this view on the spatial and the "placed", as equally constitutive and influential in the lives of my informants, the question is how do I proceed with providing some sort of representation of them? As Massey states, the reconceptualization of identity necessarily induces "a different spatiality, a different 'geography' of identities in general" (Massey, 2004:5). By assuming place to have multiple identities, being imbued with the temporal, and relationships that reach beyond it, I see it necessary to investigate these relationships in relation to ongoing discourses and events. Therefore, I view my material on discourses to be a representation of these places and spaces. In this chapter however, I will recognize the aspect of place from Ash Amin's perspective referred to in Massey (2004:6) concerning a "politics of propinquity". In other words, place, as a site where meetings take place and the negotiation of differences becomes a necessity (Massey, 2004:6). In chapter four I will take the discussion of the relational construction of identities further, unmasking the mutually constitutive character of relationships reaching beyond place, with regards to "a global sense of place".

Arenas

The field study unfolded, in a haphazard manner across several districts, in addition to the city center where I lived and spent most of my time. Focusing on one particular area in Bucharest would possibly have favored participant observation, but since my study concerns a general unsettlement reflected in discourses on ‘Others’, such a strategy would not have been adequate. Following is an example of three places that proved to be connected, which was an insight gained through moving beyond my everyday locations in central Bucharest.

I woke up every morning in my clean studio apartment to the high-pitched voices of the *fier vechi*, scrap metal collectors shouting: “*fier vechi cumpărăm!*” (“We buy old iron!”). The *fier vechi* roamed around the city like Bucharest’s raggedy stray dogs. They were a naturalized part of the environment but I never got a sufficient explanation of who they were from my young “Bucharestian” informants, who would simply state that: “I guess they are some sort of poor gypsies”. One afternoon in early spring I made a trip to a Roma village with a young Romanian student called Oana, who was brought up in a neighboring village; *the pavement was covered with pieces of plastic and a strong smell of burnt rubber filled the air. Oana explained that these were the leftovers of the Spoitori Roma, who melt the plastic around metal rods collected during the day and sell them to the villagers, the Zlatari Roma, who earn profit through reselling the material.* Parallel to my circular movements in central Bucharest, I spent time at a school in Ferentari where I volunteered as an arts teacher. The school was intended primarily for impoverished children of Roma background and constituted one of the projects of an American Baptist organization. On one occasion I got to join Laura, an employee and social worker, on house visits to the most disadvantaged pupils. She was to evaluate the material poverty of the households in order to determine the sort of aid needed.

We were standing on a dusty mud road outside of a minimal and run down house surrounded by a chicken wire fence. The family of eight shared a room of maximum ten square meters with neither electricity nor running water. The pregnant mother had left Ferentari to work in the countryside over the summer, together with their six children. The father came walking down the mud road shirtless in ripped, oil-stained jeans. His arms were covered with broad scars. Laura explained that these had been caused when collecting and carrying metal rods. The fier vechi had come full circle.

Moving across neighborhoods provided me with insights about the interconnectedness of seemingly differing areas, and how these linkages were drawn by livelihood strategies of the Spoitori Roma. My main locus was however Bucharest's city center. My Romanian informants introduced me to the city by mapping all the suitable places for me to go and hang out. These were for example, the best bookshops in town, the nicest parks, teahouses, the opera and the French institute. Although I pleaded to be taken to local *manele*⁴ discos, I ended up in indie rock clubs. All of the preferred arenas of my informants were saturated by of some sort of modern, sophisticated, metropolitan and international character. The exclusion of local music, foods and entertainment, as well as the Ferentari area and the Roma village was consistent in their orientation. The movements of the poor cut across neighborhoods and constituted connections between them, while the rigid orientation of the middle-class youth sought to maintain the reverse, the bounded and the segregated.

Urban Networking: 'Being Found'

In this section I will explain the mechanism of 'being found' by informants, which was a central and efficient method for expanding my social network throughout the fieldwork. The compositions of people who assisted and guided me during the fieldwork are mainly Bucharest dwellers from different parts of Romania. The majority of the group are in their twenties or early thirties, commonly with university degrees. My focus on this specific age range can be explained primarily by two factors. Firstly, the urban context, wherein social life for a stranger is accessible through participation in public arenas of consumption such as restaurants, cafés and bars. Young professionals whom are not yet settled and have the means to maintain a 'cosmopolitan' lifestyle tend to 'territorialize' these arenas. Secondly, the simple fact that the older generation speak very little or no English at all.

There are not too many foreigners in Bucharest, which was to my advantage, as I seemed to induce curiosity among Romanians. I felt as if I was 'being found' or spotted by my future informants. According to them, my foreign appearance made me 'stand out' from the crowd. Felix was my first and only real contact when returning to Bucharest in January. With regards to his considerable background within the social sciences he might not represent the ultimate informant being of the "analytical type" (Spradley, 1979). Dismissing an

⁴ A contemporary Romani music genre which carries Oriental and Balkan influences

intellectual informant because she or he only presents pre-analyzed cultural knowledge implies that academics are emotionally and practically detached from their societies. I am of the view that if you stay close enough to any person, regardless of their background, their contextually contingent and socialized acts, motives and ideas will become clear. I support this viewpoint with reference to Mintz, “anthropology assumes that *any* individual, in some fundamental and inalterable ways, gives expression to, incarnates, the culture, and cannot do otherwise” (1979:20).

I met Felix during the conference previous October:

As an alternative to the continental lunch in the hotel, where the conference was taking place, the organizers offered traditional Romanian food accompanied by the mercurial tunes of a Roma orchestra in front of the Bucharest City museum. I had found a bench in the afternoon sun from where I could observe the musicians and avoid being captured by the camera team filming the crowd in front of the concert and the craftsmen making jewelry and pots in the foreground. I was balancing a big plate of sarmale and mamaliga⁵ on my knees when a well-dressed young man sat down next to me and started a conversation.

Felix explained that he was engaged in the establishment of a leftist party and attended the event as part of their agenda. A few months into the fieldwork, Felix told me that he had approached me because he had thought that I looked foreign and a little lost.

Felix’ closest circle of friends was mainly constituted by foreigners, which was an outcome of a conscious choice: “*Foreigners make me experience my city with new eyes.*” He was raised in the suburbs of Bucharest, and had acquired a PhD in sociology at an early age, and was currently teaching at one of the universities in Bucharest. As a well-traveled Romanian he often felt bored with the city, but through the curiosity of newcomers, his hometown became more of a bearable place to live in. Felix showed a great deal of patience with my ignorance regarding Romania, and gladly introduced me to current topics and matters, as well as to the cultural scene and the nightlife of Bucharest. Felix did like my other ‘cosmopolitan’ informants move within the central parts of Bucharest. He lived in a two-room apartment only a few blocks away from mine and we would usually meet up by Piața Romană and walk Boulevard Magheru all the way down to the Old Centre where most of the

⁵ Typical Romanian dish consisting of cabbage stuffed with meat served with polenta.

‘interesting’ restaurants and bars were located. Bigger events such as debates, concerts and art exhibitions did commonly take place in bigger locales, for instance in old industrial houses located outside of the city center. When moving around the city at night, taxis were the common means of transportation for the young middle class. Taxis were considered cheap, as a ride within the city center would not cost more than eight lei⁶.

Another example of being spotted as a result of being foreign was when Felix took me to a ‘Balkan-Gypsy-rock’ concert shortly after my arrival in January.

When entering the crowded and smoky locale an hour before the concert, a debate on Roma issues was taking place. We were in the back of the room following the discussion up on the stage when a man approached me. He smiled and pointed at the silver ring on my finger, which a Rom smith had given me previous October during the EU event. He, and several others who had seen me at the event a few months earlier, came up to me for a chat during the evening.

The conference featured NGOs and representatives from all over Romania and was being held at the Intercontinental, in a big hall. I had barely spoken to anyone during the two days and was therefore surprised to be recognized a few months later. Thus, it was not difficult to make contact with ‘Bucharestians’, as a matter of fact I met many of my informants randomly, sometimes even on the sidewalk.

I was walking down Dacia Boulevard, on my way home when I nearly bumped into two young men carrying a bunch of hangers with women’s clothing. I excused myself and continued walking when one of them turned around. He had stains of oil paint on his jeans and claimed that he recognized me from “Circ”, a nightclub I had been to with Felix and his friends. Marcel, a sculptor in his early thirties lived just across the street from me in a big and newly renovated villa, which had belonged to his grandparents.

I bumped into Marcel yet another time at the café inside of the French Institute, which was one of the places that Felix had recommended. Marcel insisted that I join him and his good friend Alina for lunch. Alina who worked as a journalist, was a curious and enthusiastic young woman. She was eager to hear about my research project and suggested that she would help me to find more informants. Alina introduced me to her childhood friend Maria who

⁶ 1 Romanian Leu (Lei in plural) equals about 1.98 NOK (Forex, 17/04/2012)

worked as a programmer in another part of central Bucharest. The two of them had grown up together in a village northeast of Bucharest, and had moved to the capital city to study about seven years earlier.

I have several more examples of ‘being found’ during the fieldwork, but these first acquaintances helped me mapping the arenas where further networking and observation would come to take place. Felix, Alina, Maria and Marcel all took part in the same social settings. So, in addition to “being found”, my method of extending my social network had the character of “the snowball technique” (Fangen, 2004:55), facilitated by the Facebook forum. As Daniel Miller states, Facebook ought to be of relevance to an anthropologist, since the site enacts, and portrays people as parts of a wider set of relationships (Miller, 2011:2). This media came to be quite important as events, which I would not necessarily have been invited to in person, such as Roma related debates would pop up on the ‘walls’ of new acquaintances. On Facebook, I also followed discussions (with difficulty, since they were in Romanian), and found that persons whom I had met independently were in fact somehow linked to each other.

In the next section I will focus on Bucharest’s cityscape with regards to ruptures created during communism, which lingers in the present, represented by buildings and the ambivalent sentiments they evoked among inhabitants.

Bucharest

Bucharest has recently been reclaimed the least attractive capital of Europe in a renowned travel magazine. I am not in the position to protest this declaration, but I do however suspect that the critic in question is not easily seduced by asymmetry. The chaotic architectural composition covers a variation from run down interwar elegance to monotonous grey communist blocks that unmask an intriguing yet rough history. Due to Ceausescu's tactless interventions in the cityscape, every other house represents a different era. Notwithstanding this asymmetry, Bucica a Romanian social scientist argues that earlier identities of the city somehow prevail in the present. In spite of their altered makeup, these ancient segments narrate continuity on what she describes as a “profound level of identity building process and power relations” (Bucica, 2000:1). I am in accordance with this view drawing on my own perception of Bucharest as an “urban patchwork”. In addition to its incoherent structure I am also referring to the mystical presence of the old quarters beneath communist creations. Up to

500 hectares of the old city and much of Bucharest historic quarters was demolished to make place for the new civic center with The House of the Republic at its core. What is now referred to as Palace of the Parliament was erected by the communist regime, and raised through allocating disproportional amounts of national resources and manpower. More than seven hundred architects were employed under the leadership of the young architect, Anca Petrescu. The construction of the Palace was nearly finished in 1989 and following the downfall of Ceaușescu's regime it was debated whether the Palace, considered to be Europe's largest administrative building, should be sold, abandoned or even demolished.

The massive representation of the dictatorship, and all its implications for the Romanian people, sticks out like a sore thumb in the capital city. Parts of the Palace are currently used for parliamentary activities. In an attempt to reappropriate the Civic Center, an architect competition was launched in 2000, whose moderate outcome consisted amongst other things of bushes and trees being planted around the building.

The ambivalent sentiments for the Civic Center among Bucharest dwellers, was clearly expressed by the young female guide during a tour through the Palace of Parliament. We were a group of about ten tourists of different nationalities being led through selected parts of the Palace. Halfway through, a German tourist raised her hand and stated the obvious: *"Is it not sad that so many lost their lives for this Palace to be built?"* The tourist was about to continue her honoring speech regarding the worker's sufferings when the guide interrupted her abruptly, *"Well yes, but let us not talk politics!"* An awkward silence followed the harsh outburst and as if nothing had happened the guide continued hurrying us through to the next room. The tour did not offer more information than is to be found in tourist guides, which made me think of it as a formal necessity, showing the world that, "we have dealt with our past." Upon telling Felix about this experience he laughed and said that, *"The staff at our museums are backwards, and communist style."* I was not completely sure what this meant, but throughout the fieldwork I detected a recurrent irony in relation to communist times among my informants. A similar attitude is revealed in Romanian historian, Lucian Boia's account of communism, "Initiative, originality, and humor were not its characteristics. Sobriety and boredom seemed indispensable" (Boia, 2001b: 235).

My aim with this section has been to present communist ruptures in the cityscape, and how the presence of these buildings evokes ambivalent sentiments among Romanians. Buildings like Ceaușescu's palace represent an era that belongs to a recent past that has not

been dealt with entirely, which the guide's statement testified to. When speaking of communist times with Felix, he would alternate between mournful sadness, easygoing conversation and ironic jokes. The revolution in 1989 consisted of a series of uprisings that culminated in the execution of Ceausescu and his wife Elena. The National Salvation Front lead by ex-communist Ion Iliescu crushed the opposition of students and intellectuals who demanded a banning of former members of the Communist Party from national elections. The National Salvation Front, which consisted mainly of ex-members of the Communist Party, seized control over main institutions, national media, and won the elections in 1990, which they also organized. Many informants did therefore perceive the revolution as somewhat of a failure, and consequently shared an experience of alienation in relation to historical and political events ever since. This, I argue, contributes to a resignation and an idea of Romania as a country of failures, which permeated discourses on Romania, and Romanians. The political detachment among informants in addition to widespread discontent is likely connected to experiences of political alienation. Further, I view this alienation to be related to an ambiguity regarding 'Romanian failures,' which were often blamed on, either Roma, Romanians or Romanian mentality. I have meant to explain processes that have contributed to the fragmentation of belonging, and self-contempt that I observed in Bucharest, and therefore depict a place of ambivalence and flux. In the next section I will portray the disorganized cityscape and sentiments of uncertain belonging.

Disorganization and Property

"You don't have to move to be, or feel, displaced. It can happen through dispossession" (Massey, accessed 10/03/2012: 5).

Doreen Massey is referring to the intervention of class in place, which brings about dispossessions and the reshaping of belonging. Consequently, she argues that one ought to pose the question "who owns this place?" rather than "who belongs to this place?" (Massey, 10/03/2012:6). Although the author refers to a discussion on localism and globalism, I wish to keep this question in mind when reflecting upon Bucharest's disorganized cityscape. Unlike many other cities, Bucharest has no well-established class-related spatial order, and common are the cases where proprietors of houses or buildings are either absent or not yet determined. Despite dramatic disparities in Bucharest, it is not always self-evident neither who owns, nor who belongs to the landscape.

As well as narrating the past, Bucharest discloses many of Romania's current challenges and interests. Communist high-rises in major squares such as Piața Unirii are often hidden beneath commercial advertisement, which may be seen as an expression of the strife towards competitiveness in the global economy. The side streets of the partially commercialized and centrally located Centru Vechi (Old Town) are under protracted reparation, resembling gigantic sandpits. This neighborhood, such as many others in Bucharest hosts a considerable number of squatters, mainly families of Roma origin living illegally in run down houses without electricity, sewage system and water supply. Despite campaigns and halfhearted efforts during the past ten years, Bucharest's infamous stray dogs still constitute one of the main features of the urban environment. The majority are peaceful creatures roaming around the city like raggedy ghosts with plastic clips on their ears. These animals are somehow linked to the incoherent environment, being the offspring of pets who were abandoned as former residents of the historical center were forced to relocate. The dogs may therefore be looked upon as another reminder of the discontinuances implemented by the communist regime.

While the architectural mix and polluting traffic may be described as rather chaotic, it would be inaccurate to define the general atmosphere of the city as such. The civility and helpfulness of the inhabitants creates an aura of safety. I moved around Bucharest at any time of day and night with public transport, on foot or by taxi. Therefore, I understand 'disorganized' to be the fitting word to define the overriding aspect of the Bucharest cityscape.

Caldeira (2000) discusses how social inequality is reproduced in contemporary cities, by referring to a tendency of urban segregation in São Paulo. In relation to this type of fragmentation, which is based on physical division, through increased privatization, enclosure and policing of boundaries by the elite, Bucharest remains heterogeneous at large. Caldeira argues that this type of secluded spaces, in for example São Paulo and Miami, emerge at a point of transition, may it be related to political democratization or the end of an oppressive regime, and further that this designates the complexity in the interlinkages between "political forms and urban forms" (Caldeira, 2000:4). Caldeira contends that enclosures in these cities challenge ideals of equality and openness, elements that contributed to the form of modern democracies and public spaces (Caldeira, 2000:4). While I do not object to Caldeira's reasoning in relation to her case, I doubt that Bucharest's heterogeneity, with the upper class

Kiseleff area as an exception, reflects societal equality. Ash Amin, a renowned economic geographer, cautions against assumptions of mixed residential areas as sites of greater inter-cultural dialogue, “They too are places of parallel lives” (Amin, 2002:11 unnumbered document). I find this statement to reflect the situation in Bucharest, where boundaries in a complex and unsettled geography are drawn and reproduced socially. I do however take Caldeira’s idea of the interlinkages of urban and political forms into consideration when exploring Bucharest’s cityscape, where the activity of differentiation is impending, but occurs chiefly at a discursive and social level. Before I proceed, I would like to ask how it is possible to understand politics in Bucharest’s urban form?

Firstly, I wish to explain the social fragmentation as a result of communist politics; as part of the collectivization scheme, properties of opponents and rich families were expropriated by the state and used for public matters or handed out to people serving the state. Many ‘Bucharestians’ are therefore in lengthy, legal negotiations to retain family property from people who have inhabited these houses for most of their lives. In many cases where legal proprietors are absent or agreements still are unsettled, elegant villas are inhabited by poor Roma squatters. Few neighborhoods in central Bucharest can therefore be claimed as neither middle nor lower class areas. This reflects a fragmentation located not only in the macrostructure of the cityscape but also within and in between the asymmetrical facades. I argue that this socio-spatial disintegration is relevant in relation to a sense of ambivalent belonging among citizens, and that ‘a shared space’ does not necessarily reflect or evoke equality among those moving within it. I suggest that this may in fact induce an increased need for ‘positioning’ among inhabitants, through the practice of differentiating discourses. Although the Kiseleff area may be a sign of the development that Caldeira describes, which could developed further if Romania had a larger elite, the inner city is still characterized by this particular co-habitation of middle and lower classes. I will now present two empirical examples of the implications of changing politics and co-habitation in a heterogeneous urban environment. These accounts are based on informants with two different economic backgrounds.

Mihai

At the beginning of the fieldwork I had a conversation with an English-speaking taxi driver on my way home from a meeting at a mall, located a short distance from the city center. He

expressed a common hatred towards Roma minority, whereby I asked him whether he would be willing to participate in an interview on a later occasion. Mihai answered evasively that he had too much work, but agreed on having a quick coffee the same day.

Mihai, a man in his early forties, explained that he was having a hard time providing for his family that had recently been evicted from their home in Ferentari. His father had built the house where Mihai grew up on a plot that he had been assigned by the state during the early years of communism. The authorities had suddenly decided to return the plot to its 'true' proprietors, whereby they, *"lost the house to a gypsy woman"*, and former neighbor. He was now living with his elderly mother and their two dogs in a basement with barred windows. I lamented his situation, whereby he answered *"I am ok, I am young, I will have more possibilities. I just feel bad for my mom, she worked all her life and now she does not have a house anymore. Do you have a house?"*

Marcel

Marcel, a thirty-year old sculptor lived just across the street from me in a big and newly renovated interwar villa, which had belonged to his grandparents. Marcel's father had recently emptied the house of antique furniture and assigned the responsibility of overseeing the ongoing renovation to his son. Marcel, who was brought up in an upper-class suburb in London, had moved back to Bucharest a few years earlier with the rest of his family. Due to their aristocratic background, the parents had fled Romania during the onset of communism. Despite his constant complaints, Marcel showed no signs of leaving Bucharest, which made me suspect that the aspects he hated the most, such as the 'underdeveloped artsy milieu' and 'the general disorganization', were also reasons for him to stay. In comparison to other European capitals, Bucharest is inexpensive, provides less competition and more freedom for an aspiring artist.

It had taken Marcel's father years of arguing in court to retain the residence in Bucharest, and he was still litigating to recover plots in northern Romania. The house on Strada Mihai Eminescu, had been divided into smaller parts during communism, which were still inhabited by two poor families. Marcel claimed himself to be *"a communist at heart,"* but expressed an ambivalent concern for his less fortunate neighbors. He argued that it would have been better had these families lived in neighborhoods where the food was cheaper and

where they could live among people in a similar situation: *“My father has been nice to them by letting them wash his car, but they never really make an effort to change their situation.”* He also seemed anxious regarding the safety of the neighborhood with the presence of its poorer inhabitants, and followed the events on the square from his bedroom window. Despite the worries of Marcel and other neighbors, I never experienced or heard about criminal acts or violent events during the months I lived in the area.

Marcel, the communist of aristocratic descent, was not comfortable sharing his house or neighborhood with the poor. Like Felix, who characterized himself a ‘leftist’, he often frowned upon ‘peasants’, “ill-mannered and tacky dressed” Romanians who, unfortunately for Felix and Marcel, preferred the nightlife in the Old Center as much as they did. While socioeconomic disparities are great in Bucharest and Romania, the physical borders delimiting these are not clearly defined. Although an upper class neighborhood can be found west of the Kiseleff Boulevard, most neighborhoods represent people of several economic strata. This, I argue reflects the unsettled framework wherein my informants strove to define themselves. Mihai, the taxi driver who had gone from a simple yet predictable life, to the uncertainty of sharing a basement with his mother, worked day and night to recreate some sort of stability. He seemed uncertain of what that stability could consist of, and who to blame for his unfortunate situation.

In the next section, I will be focusing on the effects of the transition from communism. The opening of borders, the economy and national media have contributed to a radical change in Romanian society, creating a gap between generations. The discontinuity I have accounted for, has had an impact not only in terms of dispossession and political alienation, but has also pierced through the intimate relationships of the family.

Herăstrău: the Old and the New

My first time in Herăstrău, Bucharest’s biggest park, which is located in the northern part of the city, was on a sunny Sunday afternoon in early April. The following example is a description of the mutually informing character of the “placed and spatial”, or the local and the global. Moreover, a snapshot of a generational gap, important to the understanding of the how the transition from communism has effected Romanian society.

Michael Jackson played at maximum volume out of two fragile speakers by a stage close to the main entrance of the park. Two dressed up hosts encouraged two dancing couples that were competing up on the stage. I squeezed myself through the cheering crowd; passed an avenue of statues, grass lawns and kiosks selling fried sweets and colorful drinks. The air was filled with a sweet scent of cotton candy and caramelized popcorn. As I walked along the Herăstrău Lake I watched families playing with their pets, smooching couples and groups of teenagers on bikes and roller skates. I sat down on a bench in front of the water. Young lovers passed me by, the young women dressed up for the occasion in high heels and alluring lipstick. The young men maintained a more relaxed image, with bleached jeans, sporty sneakers and t-shirts with prints.

A teenage couple on rollerblades sat down next to me, the girl held her cotton candy with one hand and balanced a plastic cup of red soda between her thighs. The youngster, who was standing up on his rollerblades, snatched a piece from his girlfriend's cotton candy, she giggled and slapped his hand. I directed my curious glances away from the couple and looked over to the bench at my right side. An elderly couple sat close to each other watching their terrier limping around by the waterfront. Their clothing appeared way too thick for the warm weather. Both wore heavy wool coats. The face of the lady was partly hidden by a babushka tightly tied under her chin, and her husband wore a peaked cap in grey wool. The lady took two neatly packed sandwiches out of her bag and handed one to her husband. I watched them as they ate in silence. I remember thinking to myself that the image of the couple resembled a postcard from a Bucharest winter fifty years ago. Their presence among helium balloons, chemical drinks of bright red and green, mini-skirts and skateboards seemed somehow out of place. This example highlights yet another aspect of the context. As Daniel, the childhood friend of my landlady's son, Florin, put it: "Things have changed with the new Facebook-generation. We have another freedom now with the internet and everything". Daniel referred to his parental generation as different from his and somewhat backward, as did many of my other informants.

Alina and Maria grew up in the same village, northeast of Bucharest. Both of them were handed over to their grandparents as newborns, and moved in with their parents when they were ready to start school. This used to be a fairly common practice, and many of Maria and Alina's friends had spent the first years of their lives with their grandparents. Even though Alina and Maria were happy about their childhoods, they had a hard time relating to

their parents decision of “giving them up”. Alina said, *“I understand that they were young, and that they had to work, but I cannot imagine myself giving away my newborn”*. The problem of relating to their parents decisions was a mutual one, as from their parents’ part as well. Maria explained that her mother could not imagine what her daughter’s life in Bucharest was like. During communism, their parents’ life trajectories had been more or less settled by the state. They had been registered in their home village, were they were to settle and work for the rest of their lives. Alina’s mother had lamented that she could not give her daughter any advices in life, since she had not been offered ‘choices’ in her youth. Alina gave me an example from her adolescence. When Alina started developing an interest for boys, her mother had told her that she wished that she could give her advice regarding contraception, but unfortunately she did not have a clue: *“Maybe you could speak with your older friends about it?”* The parents of Maria and Alina did simply wish for their daughters to make the most out of their ‘freedom’.

The account from Herăstrău, reflects this generational gap. Since I am focusing on people in their mid twenties and thirties, I view these generational differences, which are aspects of the transition from communism, as an important influence in the lives of my informants. The “Facebook-generation” might have access to, what can be considered, more freedom, and choices, but not necessarily a greater chance to succeed due to Romania’s situation. The liberty that came with the fall of communism is not unproblematic, and as Fürst acknowledges in her tales from Moldova, the freedom had its costs, which is also true in the Romanian context (Fürst, 2009: 21). Informants often professed a bitter resignation with Romania, and dreamt of moving abroad to pursue a brighter future.

Concluding Remarks

I have shown how Bucharest’s incoherent landscape reflects and contributes to an unsettled sense of belonging. I have also accounted for a political disorganization that belongs both to the past and the present, causing heterogeneity in terms of spatial integration. The co-habitation of diverse ethnicities and classes reveal disparities, but does not necessarily interrupt boundary maintenance between groups. I have attempted to represent sentiments of frustration and alienation created in this system of disorganization, which contributes to a hostility and self-contempt among the inhabitants. In the following chapters I will explain how my informants sought to orient themselves in this context of flux. It will become clear

that their endeavors of positioning themselves were diverse and ambivalent, yet were made with a recurring, and at times, implicit reference to a hierarchy of the civilized and uncivilized.

Chapter 3: The Gypsy Other

Some days, when the progress of my project seemed to have stagnated, I walked across the quarters south of Dacia Boulevard, through streets of timeworn villas, marveled by their peculiar ornaments and windows of old, stained glass. When I got down to Calea Plantelor, I would spend the afternoon at the small library of the NEC institute⁷. This one day, in early March I took Dacia all the way down to Calea Moșilor. I observed women in green overalls sweeping the sidewalks and picking up trash as I walked down the busy boulevard. I recognized them as Roma. Probably, because I had a vague memory of being told that most municipal cleaners were ‘gypsies’. By the triangular square at the end of the street, I walked into a small green grocer. The lady by the counter smiled and chatted about the quality of the apples that I had bought. She spoke quickly and I did my best to catch up, but answered her with a polite smile. When I got out of the shop I heard loud noises from the center of the square. I saw a group of teenagers caught in a violent row among schoolbags laying dispersed on the ground. As I got closer I witnessed how the violence was quickly intensified. Three girls on the ground were punching and pulling each other’s hair. I felt relieved when a boy interrupted the fight, by dragging one of the girls aside. I was shocked when I saw him kicking at her head. At the sight of this I panicked and rushed up to the mob. I screamed and waved my cellphone: “Police, I will call the police! Stop right now!” But I seemed invisible to them. I looked around and saw the lady from the grocery store looking worriedly towards the mob from the sidewalk. Suddenly, the girl who had gotten kicked got up on her feet and started running down the street followed by two friends. The crowd dispersed quickly, but I could still hear the echoes of agitated voices from a side street. Shaken, I walked up to the greengrocer to find out what had happened. The lady was standing on the sidewalk discussing with the baker who had come out from his shop. “What happened?” I asked. The woman shook her head: “I don’t know, I think they were fighting over a boy.” Then she turned to the baker, “Trebuie să fi fost țigani” (They must have been gypsies). The baker nodded, “desigur” (of course). “What?” I asked, in an attempt to include myself in the conversation. “Țigani” (gypsies) she repeated and shook her head once more.

Analytical Framework

⁷ New Europe College: research institute

Many members of the Romanian majority tended to lump together various and mutually exclusive groups of Roma into one artificial category, with predominantly negative connotations. By studying the urban Romanian viewpoint, ‘gypsies’ appeared principally as a means of categorization. I thereby distance myself from approaches concerned with the cultural contents of ethnic groups, directing my focus on the functioning of the gypsy ‘other’ in a Romanian ordering of the world. In this chapter I intend to explain the ways in which ‘gypsies’ make sense to Romanians. As way of introduction I wish to reminisce over a conversation I had with a prominent Romanian anthropologist, whom I met on one of my last days in Bucharest. We met up at a restaurant in one of Bucharest’s blossoming backyards, where I lamented my difficulty in linking together the topics I had encountered throughout the fieldwork. I explained that I had collected several accounts of negative self-perception among Romanians in relation to the Roma topic, and that I had found frequent expressions of awe in relation to the West. Professor Mițu nodded and suggested that I would interpret these relationships on three levels, like a: *“Russian Matryoshka doll: These layers are one, hatred of gypsies, two, Romanian self-hatred and three: the ideal of the West.* Then he added: *“Romania is an unsettled country. Fragmentation is impending and feeds on, for example, evolutionary perceptions about civilization and race.”*

Mițu’s Matryoshka doll became more and more intelligible when reading and sorting my field notes back in Oslo. I will therefore proceed by presenting these layers in the order Mițu presented, starting with ‘gypsies’ in the perceptions of Romanians in Bucharest. In the following chapter I will attempt to portray and understand the pervading self-contempt. Finally, in chapter five, I will focus on an additional and Romanian ‘Other’. This ‘Other’ is relevant since it represents the epitome of ‘the uncivilized’, and is thereby linked to Romanian self-perception. Further, discourses on this ‘Other’, serve to reflect the outer layer of the Matryoshka doll “the idealized West”, in terms of its counter image.

Who are the ‘Gypsies’?

Firstly, I see it necessary to clarify my usage of the words ‘gypsy’ and Roma, since I will alternate between the two terms throughout the thesis. I primarily interpret these according to how, when and where they were used. Hence, when referring to gypsy I am speaking of it in terms of an exonym, as the socially constructed ‘Other’, belonging to Romanian discourses. In this context, Roma is but a politically correct term distant from popular speech. Informants

spoke of ‘gypsies’ as a direct translation of the Romanian word *țigani*. This conversion is, strictly speaking, inadequate, as *țigani* occupy a specific position in Romanian society and history, and a generalization across Romanian borders would therefore be unjust (Engebrigtsen, 2007:2). As I communicated with informants in English principally, ‘gypsy’ does nevertheless equal the Romanian concept of *țigan* in this thesis.

Romania has the largest Roma/’gypsy’ population in Europe, due to problems of definition common to minority populations they are estimated to constitute between 1.8 and 10 percent of the country’s total of nearly twenty-three million (Engebrigtsen, 2007:2). Roma or *țigani*, are various groups with diverse self-ascriptions, living under different circumstances, wherein their otherness may be emphasized according to differing premises. I dare, however, to contend that the common factor delimiting them from the Romanian majority is their role as the anomalous ‘Other’. Engebrigtsen’s work, based on an extensive fieldwork in a Transylvanian village, supports this perspective. She stresses that *țigani* are important to Romanian collective identity, “as ambiguous and stigmatized ‘others’” (2007:193). ‘Gypsies’, in terms of a significant ‘Other’ to collective Romanian identity, therefore mirrors a demand for a “matter out of place” (Douglas, 2004).

The Roma is a composite term for groups of ‘gypsies’ who speak dialects of the *Romanes* idiom (Engebrigtsen, 2007:2). In Bucharest however, I found the word Roma to be used first and foremost as a political tool by persons involved in organizations concerned with Roma, drawing on ideas of shared origins and cultural fellowship. I seldom heard the word *Rromi*, the Romanian equivalent of Roma, outside of the Roma rights sphere, consisting of activists, spokespersons and NGO staff. As Jenkins states, ethnic and national identities have great significance to individuals who entitle themselves accordingly, and may further serve as an organizing and mobilizing principle (Jenkins, 2002: 117). While I do not doubt the political importance of a collective ethnic term, I perceived few similarities in the lives of the educated Roma I encountered in Bucharest, the rural *clopotari*⁸ Roma I got acquainted with in Transylvania and the poor Roma in the Ferentari suburb. In their roles as ‘gypsies’ in an urban Romanian perspective, they are, however, most often spoken of as one ethnic/racial group. The Roma in Bucharest who referred to themselves as such, were exclusively educated persons, involved in organizational activities, while others such as musicians or inhabitants in

⁸ Subgroup of the *cortorari* Roma (“tent Roma”). Clopotari refers to the former specialization of manufacturing cow bells (According to Sofia, a Romanian anthropologist and informant).

Ferentari referred to themselves as ‘gypsies’/ *țigani*. ‘Gypsy’/ *țigan* is a derogatory term in the broadest sense; I will therefore refer to Roma when indicating distance from the Romanian discourse.

A Brief History

The Roma’s history in Romania can be described as a chain of different forms of exploitation shaped by political, economic and social conditions varying over time. Roma have had more or less determined roles as serfs, craftsmen or wagedworkers depending on economic and material demands (Achim, 2004). The proportionally late industrialization in Romania ended the demand for non mass produced goods, leaving Roma smiths, and craftsmen, without replacement for their former sources of subsistence. Now, Roma are to be found within all socioeconomic levels of Romanian society, although the majority, constitute the most impoverished in the country (Engebrigtsen, 2007:3). According to the Romanian historian Achim (2004), the minority’s situation was improved during Ceausescu’s regime, when Roma were assigned positions within the state apparatus. I did however find this view to be contested among young Roma intellectuals in Bucharest, who thought that Achim had no substantiation of this claim. Further, that Achim’s account was an attempt of mitigating the harsh treatment of Roma throughout Romanian history. There are few good examples in Romanian historiography of the Roma’s history in Romania. Achim’s *The Roma in Romanian History* (2004) constitutes the only extensive, translated work on the topic up to date. To his defense, Achim acknowledges the difficulty of writing Roma history during communism, since state policy, and statistics regarding the minority during the period after the Second World War has not yet been made official (Achim, 2004:189).

Connections between Roma and India have been drawn by linguistics, proving similarities between Sanskrit and Roma idioms and through ‘borrowings’ evident in Roma languages, and migration routes that have been traced throughout widespread areas (Achim, 2004:7-8). In Roma rights settings, the Indian origins were often stressed, and appeared as a unifying element for Roma populations. Roma people came to what is now Romanian territory through the Balkans during the fourteen hundreds. Most lived under different forms of slavery, which was an intrinsic part of the social system in Romania until its abolishment in 1856. In Romania, gypsies were not perceived as an ethnic problem before the 1930's, when representatives of the bio scientific field ascribed Roma as a “bio-ethnic danger,” along with

Jews (Achim, 2004:163-164). This racist mentality was enhanced further in national media and academic circles during the 1940's, during the political and ideological supremacy of Nazi Germany (Achim, 2004:166). In 1942, under the rule of Antonescu, Jews and about 25,000 'gypsies' were deported to Transnistria, an area between the Dniester River and the eastern Moldovan border to Ukraine, where they suffered under harsh living conditions until Russia's intervention in 1944 (Achim, 2004:169-180).

Gypsy Criteria

During the fieldwork, 'the gypsy' revealed itself as an aspect of Romanian self-perception, moreover 'a bad one', which Romanians seemed to think necessary to express their distance from. Engebrigtsen studied the interaction of Roma and non-Roma inhabitants in a Transylvanian village, which she describes as a relationship of interdependence regarding economic life as well as identity. Engebrigtsen thereby concludes that Roma should be understood in terms of *gypsiness*, "a mode of existence that implies their relationship to non-gypsies and the mutual ideas that govern this relationship" (Engebrigtsen, 2007:193). She thereby disregards any relevance of common origins, which I found to be emphasized primarily by Roma activists, and argues that one might only depict *gypsiness* as something produced and experienced in the present.

My study is not one of interaction between majority and minority, as my focus is chiefly on Romanians. Moreover, interaction in the urban setting does necessarily differ from that which takes place in a rural village. Urban interaction is constituted by hasty encounters between strangers, while more intimate contact occurs in closed off homes, at workplaces and public places between people who have chosen to be in contact with each other. Through participant observation among Romanians in Bucharest, the Roma-non-Roma relationship appeared intense, but less of an interpersonal interaction in comparison to Engebrigtsen's account from the village. The relationship appeared rather as one between Romanians and a negative self-perception, incorporated in the concept of 'gypsies'.

I argue that centuries of boundary maintenance have settled a non-static yet stable hierarchical division between Romanians and Roma. In Romania, scarcity concerning survival strategies is indeed pressing for both Romanians and Roma, but as the subordination of Roma carries nearly a doxic aura, 'gypsies' are unlikely to constitute a competition in

terms of resources. One of Verdery's explanations of nationalist sentiments in post-socialist states is the legacy of socialism, "as a system of organized shortage," wherein personal ties and corruption were tools for easing the imminent scarcity (Verdery, 1993:183). This, she argues lead to an increased constriction of ethnic boundaries, as personal connections became important for accumulating resources (Verdery, 1993). Verdery thereby proposes competition for resources as one possible explanation for nationalism and the strengthening of ethnic boundaries. She gives an example from Cluj in 1985, where Hungarians, who constitute the largest minority group in Romania, dominated the hairdressing services. As the shortage of hair products increased, the beauticians limited their services to Hungarian friends primarily (Verdery, 1993:184).

Ethnic occupational specialization may be a valid reality in Romania, although the majority of Roma do not offer connections or services desirable for other citizens to the same extent as Hungarians. As shown in Engebrigtsen's study, the mutual interdependence between Roma and non-Roma is due to the fact that they have differing livelihood strategies. My point is that I do not assume Roma to constitute a pertinent threat in the competition for political and economic access in Romania, and, if so, I view this aspect as a subordinated explanation for the hatred directed towards them as a constructed category. A common characteristic ascribed to this category was, in fact, that "they are lazy", and that "they never work".

The correlation between class and Roma ethnicity is obvious. As Professor Serban stated, regarding Roma in the marginalized suburb, "*Roma in Ferentari are not Roma in a cultural sense so if you wish to make a study in Ferentari it should be about abandonment in relation to the state and the world.*" This reality is in line with the concept of the 'gypsy' in most accounts of my informants. To them 'gypsies' equaled poor, uneducated and dirty, and therefore there is also a correlation between class and 'gypsy' as a notion among Romanians. The Roma that are not poor or uneducated do consequently not fit the 'gypsy concept' and are not perceived as such. During my conversation with Professor Serban regarding the difficulties she anticipated on my behalf she also said: "*People may not speak the truth or even wish to speak with you at all,*" whereby she added, "*If I go to Ferentari, these people would possibly not even want to speak with me, although I am Roma myself we do not have a lot in common.*" As Valentina, a Roma actress and activist whom I met at a debate stated, "*It's common that Romanians don't even know that some of their colleagues are Roma, although they work next to them.*"

In the Romanian perspective, which I am accounting for, Serban is not a representative of the general concept of a ‘gypsy’. Professor Serban and Mr. Stefan whom I mentioned in the introduction, can therefore be seen as ‘entrepreneurs’, using their ambiguous belonging to benefit their agendas in the Roma rights sphere (Barth, 1994: 80, Eriksen, 2010: 78). Ethnic identity is therefore negotiable in Bucharest, but the success of such a project depends on access to economic and cultural capital, and to merge with the value system of the majority, and thereby to some extent ‘appearing’ Romanian.

Gypsies in Romanian Self-Perception

I am primarily interested in ‘gypsies’ as an imperative category to Romanian self-perception, since I found ethnic classification to be connected primarily to the “requirements of the classifiers,” the Romanian majority that is, and how categorization plays a part in identity making (Eriksen, 2010: 72).

Influenced by Jean-Paul Sartre, Eriksen presents two tendencies of group solidarity: *we-hood* and *us-hood*. He explains the loyalty of *us-hood* to be based primarily in relation to the ‘Other’, and further through, “competition, enmity, symbiosis or the contrastive use of stereotypes and boundary symbols,” while the ‘we-solidarity’ reflects a collectivity based on common activities (2010: 79-80). Eriksen concludes that the feasibility of an ethnic category requires the existence of both solidarity aspects. The fact that Romanians expressed an up-front contempt, not only towards the gypsy ‘Other’ but also in relation to other Romanians, reflects an internal fragmentation. Although Romanians share ‘we-activities’, the absence of a positively loaded belonging appears to be general. The topic of negative self-perception will be discussed in depth in the following chapter.

Romanian informants represented themselves as ‘Romanians’ primarily in relation to ‘gypsies’. I account for this division by referring to many informants as ‘Romanians’. The following example highlights the discursive division between Romanians and their ‘gypsy Other’:

I had just returned to Bucharest from Iași, a city in Northern Romania where I had attended a Roma crafts event. It was a mild April evening and I had decided to meet up with Alina, Maria and their childhood friend, Tatiana, at an open-air café close to my apartment. The three of them had already occupied one of the tables in the thriving courtyard when I

arrived, and they were all keen to hear about my first voyage out of the capital. As the crafts fair had been somewhat of a disappointment, I started telling them about my intense seven-hour trip back to Bucharest. At the event I had met Vlad, the drummer of a band, who's manager, Mr. Stefan, who I knew from Bucharest. The day after the event a tour bus had pulled up in front of my hotel. Vlad jumped out and insisted that I pack my bags immediately and catch a ride with the band back to Bucharest. I had already bought a return ticket and hesitated, whereby I turned to Sofia, an anthropologist from Sibiu who encouraged me, "It will be good for your thesis." The seven hours to come were accompanied by trumpet, guitar, and passionate singing. When retelling the experience that evening, I emphasized the fact that all of the musicians had been male. Thus explaining the tedious and inappropriate advances of some of the younger musicians that I had endured throughout the trip. Maria asked me, "Where they Romanians or gypsies?" "Gypsies," I answered, whereby Maria exclaimed, "Oh my God!" and burst out laughing.

I felt rather disappointed with my answer. It had not been my intention to refer to the musicians as bad, or as 'gypsies' for that matter, but my answer was proof that I had incorporated the discourse; to separate gypsies from Romanians. Had there not been such a clear distinction, however, one could not argue for the significance of the 'gypsy other' to Romanian identity.

The confusion of two extremes

The following example, serve to introduce the subtle, yet recurrent, associations wherein Romanians positioned themselves, 'gypsies' and me, as a representative of the 'civilized West', within a hierarchical scale of comparison.

Mariana, a middle-aged lady and the owner of a studio apartment was looking approvingly at me, and Felix who had joined to 'negotiate' during his lunch break. I had never negotiated about rent before, something that Felix explained to be common practice in Romania. Mariana smiled, "you two are like my son, the same type." As I got to know Mariana better it turned out that she spoke English quite well, although this first time she addressed Felix in Romanian. She was inquiring him about my studies and despite our joint efforts she kept misunderstanding my motive. "Roma? Is she going to study ancient Rome?"

she asked Felix. Once she understood what we had been trying to say, her face gave away an expression of skepticism and concern.

In conversations with new acquaintances, it became routine to sort out confusions regarding ancient Rome. The fact that Romanians mistook the Roma for the Roman Empire could easily be explained by the literal similarity of the words, or the fact that Roma usually are referred to as *țigani*. Although the politically correct *Rromii*, and Romanian equivalent of Roma, is rarely used in popular speech, most Bucharest dwellers recognize and understand the term because of recent discussions in media regarding the relevance of the term. I do not view these misunderstandings as random misinterpretations, but as a matter of dissociation. Most gave a dramatic reaction of surprise when they realized what my actual focus was about. For many it seemed more likely that a foreign researcher would come to study the local legacy of the Roman Empire than Romania's least presentable asset, the *țigani*/‘gypsies’.

Romanian Racism: “Your shit is worse than our shit”

Right wing extremist movements, such as, the ultra-nationalist Noua Dreaptă (“The New Right”, founded in 2000) and Greater Romania Party (founded in 1991) have featured in Romanian politics during recent decades. ‘Antiziganism’ in Romania is not, however, like the Hungarian version, due to nor part of a well organized political undertaking. This racism is, nevertheless, general and exists as an overall axiom well integrated in everyday discourse. I asked Professor Mițu whether Romanian racism could in anyway be compared to anti-immigration movements in Scandinavia. Without hesitating he answered, “*No. In Romania it is a matter about that your shit is worse than our shit.*” Mițu’s statement indicates that boundary maintenance from the Romanian part, which, in its simplest form as a mere reproduction of undifferentiated negativity towards ‘gypsies’, has to do with a certain type of scarcity. I argue that the shortage relevant to this type of contempt has to do with the lack of positively loaded identification. In other words, that negative positioning towards ‘gypsies’ concerns a competition for positive identification in Romania. As the young sociology student Liviu (a friend of my neighbor Florin) put it:

“We did not care as much about gypsies before, but with the increased media attention on Romania following the problems in France⁹, we have gotten more and more irritated. Romanians don’t want to be associated with gypsies. I think that is the reason why many Romanians oppose the term Roma, since it can be confused with ‘Romanian’”.

I perceive Petrus’ reasoning regarding an increased frustration following the international media attention on Romania to be interesting. I do not, however, view this as the sole explanation, or the main cause for ‘antiziganism’ in Romania, but as an argument for studying identity-making with a broader and more global perspective. As I have shown in the previous chapter, I was often met with disbelief when presenting the initial aims of my study. The following example highlights the declaration of Romania’s problems and associations expressed in relation to myself, as a representative of the successful nations of Western Europe.

Gypsies are our Problem

The summer and the real warmth had come to Bucharest. Air conditioners were climbing the walls of high risers like square insects on gigantic grey sugar lumps, launching off heavy drops of water on the sidewalks, and sometimes straight on by-passers. I had just left the apartment of my American friend Martin, where I had borrowed a CD for the art’s class to be held the same afternoon at the school in Ferentari. I was late and in a part of town where I could not catch the metro to the bus that usually took me to the school. I managed to flag down a cab in the busy intersection of Calea Moșilor and Bulevardul Carol I. The driver greeted me with courtesy common to Bucharest’s inhabitants: “Bună ziua domnișoară!” (Good day Miss!). He was chatting and smiling energetically at me through the rearview mirror. I remember feeling a warm gratitude towards Bucharest’s taxi drivers for giving me infinite chances to practice my poor Romanian. The driver, like many of his colleagues, encouraged me by insisting that my Romanian was very good. I asked him to drive me to Lacul Bucura, whereby he inquired, “Ești profesoara?” (Are you a teacher?). “Da”, I confirmed, “în psihologie?” (In psychology?). “Nu, sunt profesoara de arte” (No, I am an art teacher). “Arte!,” he exclaimed. “Well, I am really an anthropology student,” I explained.

⁹ Petrus refers to the commotion in the media in August 2010, following the demolishment of temporary settlements and deportation of Romanian Roma from France backed by President Sarkozy.

“Ce frumos!” (How nice!). “The beginning of civilizations,” he sighed. “No, I study culture and people,” I explained. Whereby he exclaimed: “Sweden is democracy number one! And Norway has oil, still there is no war between the countries. How beautiful!” Then he shook his head: “But Romania,” he sighed, “Do you think Romania has problems?” he asked. “Yes,” I admitted, “many problems, but beautiful people,” I added in an attempt at being honest yet supportive. The taxi driver shook his head with a grim expression on his face: “The gypsies are our problem! They live in Ferentari, where you are going Miss.” “Yes, I know, most of them are very poor, like my students,” I answered.

I could spot a dark high-rise with laundry lines covering the balconies, which marked the beginning of the street where the school was located. As we turned right, and drove passed a vegetable stall, I took twenty lei out of my purse: “Mulțumesc frumos, o zi buna” (Thank you very much, have a good day). As I walked towards the school building, a boy of about twelve with a cigarette hanging from the corner of his mouth and a baby on his shoulders passed me. A group of children with torn and dirty clothes followed him down the street and passed the school. Some students were playing inside of the courtyard. One of my pupils, a boy with one leg shorter than the other, waved energetically at me before I entered through the backdoor of the school. I passed the small health clinic at the far end of the building where a young mother was waiting for her turn with a crying and red-faced toddler on her lap. Her eyes were tired and followed me as I took a right towards the stairs to the teachers’ office. I cursed as I tripped and hit my knee on the glazed tiles. It was not the first time I fell in the stairs, where the distance between every other step varied considerably.

The driver did as many other Romanians I met, lament Romania’s situation, and blatantly blame ‘gypsies’ for it. The misery in Ferentari does, however, mirror a life situation offering little agency to its inhabitants, and way too little to drag down the whole nation. The poor are however visible not only in this neighborhood, as scrap metal collectors roam around the whole city in their quest for leftovers, and beggars are to be seen at every subway station of Bucharest. With this in mind, it can be argued that ‘gypsies’ are indeed Romania’s problem; in terms of a disgraceful reality, defiling the Romanian image. I often encountered the type of admiration expressed by the driver for Scandinavia, and for Western Europe, and consequently a bitter resignation in relation to Romania. Irrefutably, this type of comparison was a presentation done as a consequence of my presence. This fact does not rule out the relevance of the comparison to Romanian self-perception.

An Ambiguous Warning

Mariana, my landlady lived two blocks away from my flat, but because of her back problems she usually sent her son Florin over whenever something needed to be fixed or done in the apartment. Florin, a programmer in his mid twenties lived in another of his mother's apartments, just across the street from me, with his girlfriend and their dog. A few days after I had moved into the apartment, he was sent over by his mother to install the Internet.

After a few attempts we concluded that my Mac required a specific modem, instead of the Romtelecom type he had brought. Florin smoked a cigarette on my balcony while I complimented the beauty of the neighborhood. Florin agreed and added, "but not all areas are like this one." I continued talking about how I loved Bucharest and how happy I was with my experience so far. Florin added dryly, "Yes, so far, but you just wait and see." I thereby explained how extraordinarily helpful I found Romanians to be. Florin smirked, "I assure you, they are only nice to foreigners." After having informed him about my project and my plans to spend time outside of the city focusing on the marginalized Roma population, Florin told me that he had negative experiences from the countryside and that I better avoid poor areas. I asked him to tell me more about the experience he was referring to:

"When my class went on a bus trip to the mountains, many years ago, we ended up in a gypsy village. We were very scared. They were following the bus and there were many wild dogs. In the evening we went to a local pub, it was scary." Florin took a break.

"Did anything happen?" I asked.

Florin: "No, but I have friends that told me stories. A friend of mine happened to hit a horse in the middle of the night. They keep their horses loose, and the whole village came out and they were close to lynching him."

When Florin was about to leave he stopped in the hallway in front of the door and turned back looking at me with an ambivalent expression on his face: "To be honest with you Saskia; unfortunately, many Romanians are very racist. Even though I know better, I too have my ideas, because I experienced things and...", he interrupted himself. I filled in, "I have heard many negative comments and stories since I came here." Florin nodded: "I hear these things all the time, but I am not sure that you are going to hear the same things since you are a foreigner, at least not the more serious comments. Honestly, about one out of twenty

Romanians would agree that it would have been better if Antonescu had killed more gypsies. I assert you; their situation today is very similar to that of the Jews' before the Second World War. If such a situation would occur, and we had a leader like Hitler, the same thing that happened to the Jews would happen to the gypsies. I am sorry to tell you, but this is the way it is."

Before he left he repeated what he had said a few times before, "If there is anything you need help with, please call, and if you need to borrow our computer you can come over to my place, my girlfriend spends most of her time in school, it would be my pleasure."

Florin had left me puzzled. I was uncertain of his message and quite sure of that he was too. At first it had seemed as if he wished to warn me of the dangers that encounters with 'gypsies' might entail, whereby he had countered, informing me about the extreme racism I would meet among Romanians. The latter as a way to prepare me for what I was about to hear, and at the same time giving the impression of being worried about what I would not hear enough. At the beginning of the conversation he had seemed equally negative about Bucharest too, and Romania in general. I extract two main points out of the conversation with Florin: negativity towards 'gypsies' and negativity towards Romania. I argue that these points make up central parts of a Romanian worldview. The way of talking about these things reflects relationships in Romania, and Romanian relationships to the West.

When I brought up the 'gypsy topic' during interviews, informants often presented biographical stories about their relations to Roma. These accounts tended to be more analytical and nuanced than random anecdotes I heard in every day situations. Florin's ambivalent account represents the threshold between his analytical ability and his socially contingent reasoning. Bauman accounts for such a state as a result of a struggle wherein the imaginary, doxic view and its consolidation, serves to hinder infiltration of "wandering thoughts" (Bauman 2002: 17). Thus, the racist discourse belongs in a commonsensical context, wherein Romanians are socialized. In this discourse, I seldom encountered more than two types of 'gypsies': good or bad. This dichotomy appeared to work effectively in the reproduction of the 'gypsy' concept. As long as there are good 'gypsies', there must also be bad ones. Moreover, this dichotomy is created at a distance, and the fact that it entails a simplification into good and bad, makes 'gypsies' even more suspicious to Romanians. Following example is of the 'random kind' and shows how slippery the 'bad' criteria, related to the categorization of 'gypsies' can be.

Bad Gypsies/Bad Romanians

I had ordered a taxi that would take me to a shopping mall in the Militar area, located a little outside of the city center, where I would meet up with an informant. As soon as I spotted the yellow car from my balcony on the third floor, I grabbed my bag and hurried down the stairs. The driver was curious as to why I had come to Romania. Thus, the conversation started as most did; we went through the common misunderstanding regarding ancient Rome, whereby he shouted, “ȱigani are bad, dirty thieves!” I explained that the only time I had ever been robbed in Bucharest was when a Romanian guest at a hostel stole my mac. “Are you sure he was Romanian?” the driver screamed with saliva spraying out of his mouth and his torso twisted towards the backseat. “Yes”, I answered, slightly annoyed by his sudden loss of interest in the traffic jam we had been caught in by the Unirii Square, “We had a long conversation the day before he stole my computer. He was from Sibiu, Transylvania, and hated gypsies himself because as he said, ‘they steal’”. The driver looked at me with disbelief: “Are you sure he was? There are blond and blue-eyed gypsies from Transylvania you know.” I answered: “So I have heard, he was not blue eyed though. He was somewhat of a Romanian patriot, and hated all minorities, especially Hungarians.” The driver laughed and shook his head: “Well, well, we sure have plenty of shitty Romanians too.” I tried, “and good ȱigani too!” The driver spat: “Ha! I am fifty years old and I have never in my life met a good one.” I could not help but comment, “Well maybe that is because you cannot tell Roma from Romanians.” He laughed once more and repeated, “Not once I tell you!”

According to this temperamental driver, there was only one type of ‘gypsies’, bad ones. As a matter of fact ‘gypsies’ in his view equaled bad. On these premises it did, however, seem rather tricky to separate ‘gypsies’ from Romanians, since he admitted that, there are some “shitty” Romanians too. Further, while their specific character was simply bad, their appearances could vary, and could in fact be confused with Romanians. As I mentioned in the introduction, many Roma live under the pretense of being Romanian. Mr. Stefan, a prominent spokesperson and manager of the band I traveled with from Iași is a good example of this. During his adolescence, he denied being Roma, and took on the “Romanian role,” going as far as to actively joining fights against ‘gypsies’. As Valentina, an actress and Roma stated, “Romanians do not know that their colleagues are Roma, although they work next to them everyday.”

Racism as Commonsense

I found the racist discourse to be actively reproduced in Romanian media and politics, wherein ‘gypsies’ are criticized and mocked on an everyday basis. Based on common themes in the stories of my informants, I believe that commonsensical racism against ‘gypsies’ also, had its roots in childhood experiences. In Romania, as in many other countries, ‘gypsies’ have the reputation of being baby abductors. This myth was used as a tool in childrearing, as the parents of my informants told them that, *“If you behave badly the gypsies will come and take you.”* Gigi, Florin’s younger cousin, a student of architecture, who had recently moved to Bucharest from his home village, reflected on this rumor during a conversation at the café of the French institute: *“Well, there might be some truth to it. Considering that they have a lot of children themselves, who are useful for earning money and helping at home.”* I asked whether he had any experiences that strengthen his suspicions? Gigi explained that he had observed several police cars surrounding a gypsy compound in his hometown a few years ago and concluded that this might have been because the inhabitants had stolen a Romanian baby.

Gigi described himself as a “gypsy-friendly guy.” He explained that his girlfriend from the village did, however, hate ‘gypsies’ and wished for all of them to die. Gigi was less inclined to such extreme ideas because of his father, who had taught him not to judge too quickly. He told me about the sympathetic poor nomads who had lived in tents behind his backyard. *“They were friendly, and only noisy when they had weddings, but they were otherwise polite and social.”* Then there were also the less sympathetic ‘gypsies’ in his neighborhood: *“There are also gypsies with money, you should stay away from them if you have business, they always cheat and scam. They scam everyone, nothing bites.”*

As Gigi went outside to have a smoke, I thought about what he had said. According to himself, he was open-minded and did not judge anyone. By portraying different types of gypsies, both ‘good’ and ‘bad’, he gained a voice of reason, in comparison to his girlfriend. Being sensible, he could also allow himself to come to the conclusion that there might be some truth to the baby abductor myth. Like Florin, Gigi gave room for “wandering thoughts,” while the “doxic reasoning” eventually lead him back to the spiral of commonsensical racism. At the end of our conversation, I asked Gigi whether his girlfriend would be willing to meet me. Gigi hesitated a little, *“Well, she barely speaks English. But I could come with her and translate.”* I did eventually arrange a meeting with Christina at the café where I used to meet

her boyfriend. After half an hour of waiting I texted Gigi, but another fifteen minutes passed before he answered that Christina was unable to come. I tried reaching her several times after this, but I never got an answer. Being stood up was a recurrent problem during fieldwork.

Oana

As I mentioned in the previous chapter, I often had the experienced of “being found” in Bucharest. I met Jeff, a middle-aged American, at a crossing on Dacia Boulevard. He seemed to have sensed that I was foreign, and asked me for directions to Piața Romana. As I was heading the same way, we walked a few blocks together while I told him about my research project. Jeff suggested that I would contact a friend of him called Sarah, who he had become acquainted with at the synagogue that they both visited regularly. Sarah was a freshman at the university, and, according to Jeff, she would be glad to help me translate during interviews.

Sarah called me up only a few days after my encounter with Jeff, and was indeed very keen to translate for me. In exchange, I offered to help her with applications to American universities, as her dream was to become a lawyer in the United States. Throughout fieldwork, I met Sarah on a regular basis. We usually had coffee close to her university and talked about her dreams of moving to America. Although I made many attempts to explain my project to Sarah, I was never completely sure whether she understood or actually cared about what my aims were. Sarah was, however, happy to hang out with me, and assist me in any way. One day, Sarah called me up, sounding very excited: *“I found you the perfect informant! Her name is Oana and she is in my Jewish studies class.”* According to Sarah, Oana was the ‘perfect informant’ since, *“She lived in an area full of gypsies”*.

Because I was curious about Sarah’s understanding of ‘the perfect informant’, I met up with Oana the following week by the Intercontinental, at Piața Universității. We sat down at one of the cafés along Magheru Street, and ordered coffee. Oana was like Sarah, a witty and verbal nineteen year old, and had become fluent in English from watching television. Oana lived with her parents about ten kilometers outside of the capital in a small village. She described it as a: *“Multi-mixture-of-different-cultures-place, centered around the school. The school was mixed, we had rroo.. I don’t know how to say it,”* she confessed. I was surprised that Oana made the effort to pronounce the politically correct term rromi, instead of gypsy or țigani. Her attempt indicated sensitivity in relation to the implications of the two

denominations, unlike most informants who despite their awareness of this distinction insisted on using the word gypsy/țigani. When I asked Florin about his opinion on the conclusion of a recent debate, whether Roma should be called țigani, he shrugged: *“Honestly, I think its good. Historically they have always been țigani, why change it now?”*

Oana went on telling me about the Roma of her neighborhood, their customs and internal differences, explaining that some were traditional and others not. She stated that: *“I don’t hate gypsies, I don’t hate anyone. But their character is different from Romanians. I know amazingly smart and kind ones that are black.”* Oana presented three types of Romanians: *“Those who love gypsies, those who have nothing to do with them, and those who hate them”*. She placed herself in the middle category, and added, *“those that do not care.”* Oana continued: *“I appreciate their liberty of thinking, they are not afraid of cops or the law. They drive car without a license. It’s very nice to be liberal, and they do anything they want. They learn how to drive when they are five or six years old, so they drive very well, but very fast.”* Oana, however, hated ‘cops’ herself. She was in the process of getting her driving permit, and seemed very anxious about it. She was worried because she was unsure which police officer she was expected to bribe in order to get her license approved. Other informants confirmed that bribing officers, as well as health personnel, was both expected and common in various situations. A relaxed relationship to the law appeared both a general and structural phenomenon in Romania, rather than an ethnic one.

Having become accustomed to the upfront racism among Romanians I met, I perceived Oana as an open-minded individual, which might seem strange taken out of context. She was of course generalizing in her views, but she was far less extreme than most Romanians I had met. At the end of our conversation, Oana suggested that I should come with her to the village the following week.

Dogs and Gypsies: Manifestations of Embodied Prejudice

Ideological hegemony refers to how relationships of domination and exploitation are entrenched in the overriding notions of society, and how they evoke consent to these relationships (Mahutga, Matthew, Stepan-Norris, Judith, 2007). Bauman describes ideological hegemony, not so much as an articulated belief, but rather as something incorporated in peoples’ way of life, retained through acts and stances (2002: 20, my translation). The

following example highlights how involuntary reactions of fear and repulsion mirror the doxic gypsy concept among Romanians. The example brings forth the complexity of carrying multiple images, one of intention and another of socialization, and the struggle between the doxic view and “wandering thoughts,” that people, or in this case Oana, allow themselves at times. Even though Oana had expressed her indifference in relation to Roma, her reactions during our walk through a Roma settlement indicated the contrary.

A Walk Through Sintești

Roughly a week after our first meeting I met up with Oana at Universitatii. Inside the train she warned me: “I don’t know if you have been to such a place before, they will stare, scream things and you might get scared. I just want you to be prepared.” In Ferentari, we climbed into a small bus. Two elderly ladies with babushkas tied under their chins were already occupying a double seat each. When a lady in a black babushka and long braids made her way through to the back end of the bus, Oana frowned, “So you wanted to see them, there you go, and they smell as well.” We drove by markets, blooming fruit trees and grey buildings with laundry lines on the balconies. Within ten minutes the high-rises gave way to smaller houses, with chicken wire fences defining small gardens. Oana explained that there were three villages close to each other: Vidra, Cretești and Sintești. I was confused, “So we are not going to your village?” Oana answered: “No, we are going to Sintești, a place where I used to hang out, but I wouldn’t really go alone, it is a scary place for girls.” Just before we jumped off the bus Oana turned to me with a smirk: “Enjoy the ride!”

We were standing at the roadside at the beginning of a village. Bleak, greyish fields were stretching out on both sides of the road. Oana pointed at a ramshackle wooden house, “That’s an example of a poor gypsy house.” We started walking, “and that is an example of a rich gypsy house” Oana pointed at an enormous building with a remarkable roof at our left. Three young girls with long hair on a bench spoke to us: “Stay and talk to us. If you walk into the village you should be aware of dogs, they might bite.” Women in colorful long skirts, headscarves and golden earrings brushed the pavement in front of the houses. They yelled, “Ey Domnișoară!” (Miss!). We were again warned about the dogs. As we moved further into the village, Oana gradually lost the self-confidence she had been projecting so far. Up to then she had seemed concerned about my reaction, communicating her experience with the

neighborhood. It seemed she had not anticipated the fear the village would come to evoke in her.

We walked by a group of men barbecuing quietly by the roadside, as a squeaky horse and carriage passed us. I noticed that there was indeed a larger number of stray dogs the further we went into the village. Although they did not seem to notice us, scavenging for food in the trashcans, Oana seemed nervous. I tried keeping up, but Oana kept increasing her pace. A group of women standing outside of a small shop attracted our attention; they smiled and invited us to stay for a chat. An elderly lady asked where I was from, but, as I was about to answer, Oana dragged me along. I could hear the lady behind us warning us about the dogs. I asked Oana if she would slow down so we could talk to villagers, but she protested, "No, because, they will never let us go!" I turned around and smiled apologetically at the women who kept insisting. When a police car passed us for the second time Oana panted, "Oh my God! Now I love them!" Oana accelerated further and mumbled that we ought to be very close to the Romanian village, and that she could not recall that the gypsy settlement was this big. At a point where the road got increasingly narrow, a horse and carriage blocked our way. The option was to pass three dogs on one side, or a group of men on the other. Oana was panicking. "Oh no, men!" she moaned. I encouraged her to walk and breathe slowly, but Oana had had enough: "We'll take the first bus that comes which ever direction it's going." We stopped close to an old man who was wiping his forehead with a napkin. Oana nodded, "See that old Romanian, he's scared, that's why he is sweating."

Afterthoughts

I had not been completely comfortable with the dogs during the walk through the village. I did however feel a lot safer with the inhabitants who tried warning us about them. To me, it seemed fairly reasonable for residents of a sleepy rural community to approach 'intruders'. I did not find the women threatening or angry, on the contrary, I found them welcoming and curious; "What are you ladies doing here?" "Stay and talk to us," and "Be aware of the dogs." Had these dogs been kept to protect the property, I might have perceived the warnings as threats, but these were random stray dogs sticking around due to the garbage piling up behind the houses. I am, however, not Romanian and have thereof no history of internalizing the notion of gypsies as different, and possibly dangerous. One may assume that this notion is adopted in an early stage of a socialization process into a Romanian 'objective' reality. Berger

and Luckmann (2006) stress that living in a society entails taking part in its dialectic, and what enables this is amongst other things internalization. They argue that society should be understood as an ongoing dialectic process constituted by: externalization, objectification, and internalization (Berger, Luckmann, 2006: 135). The latter, internalization shapes the instant interpretation and understanding of an objective occurrence as expressing a meaning. Further that the individual is born into an objective social structure, but also into an objective social world, mediated by significant others (primary care takers and so forth) (2006: 137). The baby abductor myth that I discussed with Gigi is an explicit example of how the ‘gypsy other’ is presented by significant others, and internalized during the primary socialization process. I will not dwell further on this topic, but my point is merely that although Oana wished to stay indifferent, her internalized image of the ‘gypsy other’ provoked strong emotions in her during our walk through the village. When I asked Oana about this on a later occasion, she seemed embarrassed by the fact that she had displayed such fear. She insisted that the dogs were the sole reason for her anxiety, explaining that she had got bitten recently. Stray dogs are, however, a general trait of Romania, some areas in Bucharest have almost as many dogs as the village had, and most Romanians I know have been bitten at least once in their lives. My intention is not to discharge Oana’s fear of dogs, but to emphasize her reaction in relation to the villagers.

A Manifestation

During early spring I met up with Daniela, who I had had become acquainted with through common friends, at a popular bar in the Old Centre. Daniela was born in Romania, but had moved to Norway as a child together with her Romanian family. She had returned a few years earlier to study engineering in Bucharest. She was homesick at this point, and seemed very keen to socialize with another Scandinavian. We sat at a French Café in the Old Centre when a sick stray dog limped passed us. Daniela shook her head and lamented the miserable situation of Bucharest’s stray dogs: *“I feel sorry about the dogs, they are often treated badly. This one was probably kicked by a gypsy.”* As I could not overlook her hasty assumption, I asked her what she really meant. That afternoon Daniela did her best to explain to me how ‘gypsies’, all over Romania, are equally bad and immutable: *“In Constanța, I saw a dirty Gypsy kid wandering around half naked with a knife in his hand. They don’t care for their*

children. Saskia, you are one of those idealist Scandinavians, I know your kind, but you know nothing about Romania.”

A few weeks later I found myself at the same bar where I first had met Daniela. I had come there together with Felix, his friend Christian, and his girlfriend Cristina. Daniela eventually joined our table, and sat down next to Cristina, and me.

I was following Daniela and Cristina’s discussion over the fact that a group of beautiful old benches had been stolen from a park in Bucharest. Cristina concluded that they were most likely stolen by some gypsies. Daniela winked at me and countered with an affected feminine voice (similar to my high-pitched voice), “No, don’t say that, we should feel sorry for the poor gypsies!” Cristina, who was unaware that Daniela, in reality, shared her view, and who was acting to mock mine, got furious: “Do not come telling me about gypsies, I have lived in this country for all my life, and I know for a fact that they are all bloody thieves!” Daniela smiled self-righteously at me and answered: “Oh really?” as to say: “See, this is the way everyone views it here. Who is right, they or you?”

Daniela’s manifestation was a lesson in the ways of Romania. But, what was the real underlying message of this manifestation? Rather than proving that all gypsies are bad, she simply settled that Romanians are racist.

Concluding Remarks

According to Mițu’s Matryoshka doll, Romanians place themselves, as a middle category in between the lower ranked gypsies, and the superior and idealized west. He claimed further, that Romania is an unsettled, and fragmented society where evolutionary perceptions of civilization and race prevail. According to my observations, this hierarchical division is truly relevant in Romanian identification. I have shown how Romanians share *we-activities*, while this middle category appear somehow fragmented. While ‘gypsies’, and the West were projected as stable, and undifferentiated categories, the Romanian group appeared as split in the sense of being superior in relation to gypsies, and inferior in relation to Western civilizations. In the following chapter I will proceed by investigating this peculiar self-image further.

Chapter 4: Romanian Self-Contempt

The aim of this chapter is to direct the focus away from the ‘gypsy’ concept, or the ‘inner part of the Matryoshka doll,’ in line with Professor Mițu’s interpretation. Here, I will immerse myself in the second layer, Romanians, with an emphasis on Romanian’s accounts of themselves. As I have already mentioned, I was regularly warned of untrustworthy and ill-mannered Romanians. As my experience of Romanians was the opposite, this recurring self-contempt puzzled me at first. This chapter is an attempt to understand Romanian self-contempt, pessimism, and Romanian’s positioning of themselves in the world.

I will initiate with a discussion featuring my analytical outlook on the topic, and thereafter proceed by presenting data and reflections. My aim is to arrive at an understanding of identity-making as entrenched in a larger context of relationships, involving both the day-to-day and ‘placed’ relationships of Bucharest, and those reaching beyond. In the article *Geographies of Responsibility* (2004), Massey stresses that the local place is not simply a passive victim of global forces, but also a locus for the constitution of the global (Massey, 2004:7). In relation to Massey’s case, which is London, a city beaming with global self-esteem where decisions are made that effect localities far beyond the metropolis, Bucharest appears as of somewhat a counter image. Bucharest has far less economic and political agency than other European capitals, something lamented by informants in terms of a bitter resignation with Romania. I am not implying that Bucharest, in terms of a counter image of London, is a passive victim of global forces. I do however acknowledge objective differences such as economic and political power within a broader hierarchy, to be relevant in relation to self-perception of the city’s inhabitants. By subordinating themselves in relation to what was commonly referred to as “civilized countries”, and blaming this subordination on Romanian mentality, my informants made use of a ‘global sense of place’ when reproducing a negative self-perception. The mutual aspect of this, the influence of other Europeans’ actual views or accusations that is, has been taken into account in my reasoning, but has a subordinated role in this thesis due to the lack of academic material on the topic.

As I have mentioned earlier, the concepts of civilized/uncivilized were used as a reference point in various settings, and as a tool for orientation among my informants. Depending on the situation, the connotations of this pair of concepts could be, for instance, biological or geographical, and relate to an analogy of other dichotomies. One could make the

common assumption about the positioning I am speaking of, to be a result of globalization and opening of borders, provoking a greater demand for exclusion. I do contend, however, that this need for positioning and self-definition, although it plays on relationships reaching beyond the locality of Bucharest, are, to a greater extent, a result of a highly ambiguous context, which I have accounted for in length in chapter two. In the following section I will provide a brief discussion on self-contempt to settle my conceptualization of the phenomenon.

Self-Contempt and Self-Conception

Sander Gilman, an American historian who is primarily known for his works in Jewish studies, has contributed to an understanding of the subject with his book *Jewish Self-Hatred. Anti-Semitism and the Hidden Language of the Jews* (1986). Though his approach is not anthropological, and his analytical tools are noticeably psychoanalytical, I see his reasoning as a relevant ground for discussing Romanian self-contempt. I thereby approach Gilman not as a direct reference but as a point of departure. By way of introducing the concept of self-hatred Gilman explains:

“Self-hatred results from outsiders’ acceptance of the mirage of themselves generated by their reference group - that group in society which they see as defining them - as a reality. This acceptance provides the criteria for the myth making that is the basis of any communal identity” (Gilman, 1986:2)

What Gilman terms the ‘reference group,’ is in other words involved in the construction of negative self-perception among Jewish people. I wish to take this argument a little further and place Romania’s reference group outside of its national borders, as an imagined Western superior in relation to which Romanians presented themselves. So, in this case it is not so much what the reference group says about Romanians, but what Romanians imagine themselves to look like in the eyes of the Western world. Therefore, one might argue that Romanians characterize themselves as ‘the outsiders,’ while by doing this they inevitably become ‘the reference group’ too. Consequently, rather than self-perception, this chapter concerns the constitutive processes of ‘self-conception’, in other words the acceptance of the reproduction of a negative self-construction.

Romanians in the World

In order not to essentialize the ideas I have come across, I find it necessary to acknowledge and uncover my role in conversations with my informants. By unmasking my own position in interaction with Romanians, an important factor will come to the fore, that this interaction necessarily embodies and reproduces relationships reaching beyond the ‘placedness’ of Bucharest. The fact that I was a foreigner from a privileged Scandinavian country very likely provoked these negative narratives of Romania that I encountered. This does not, nevertheless, make these accounts less relevant or interesting, since they reveal Romanians’ positioning within a hierarchical, global scale of comparison. This positioning became evident due to a recurrent reference to civilized and uncivilized nations, with Romania belonging to the latter. Interestingly enough, this distinction was analogous to the division made by Romanians with regards to Romanians and ‘gypsies.’ Engebrigtsen, who emphasizes this tendency, makes use of Romanian notions of civilization, when exploring the discourse of what she terms “Romanianness.” Engebrigtsen, who bases her discussion on sociologist Norbert Elias’ concept of civilization, acknowledges the local understanding of civilization to concern ethnic groups, and hierarchies between them (Engebrigtsen, 2007:18). Her account from a Transylvanian village thereby aligns to a great extent with the usage of the civilized/uncivilized dichotomy in Bucharest. When Romanians were to position themselves, as a nation, or a culture in relation to the world and me, they often categorized themselves in the same way they would subordinate ‘gypsies’ in relation to themselves, as ‘the uncivilized’. Engebrigtsen stresses that the civilization discourse is indeed, applied both within and outside of Romania, which implies, “the general ambiguity towards both ‘uncivilized țigani’ and ‘civilized strangers’” (Engebrigtsen, 2007:25). While Gilman explains Jewish self-hatred as an acceptance of the reference group’s negative ideas, Romanian self-contempt appears to emerge in comparison to an image of ‘civilized nations,’ and, with references retrieved from their ‘gypsy Other’. Having outlined the significance of the civilized/uncivilized discourse in the field, and in the worldview of my informants, which I will return throughout the chapter, I wish to return to the topic of self-contempt.

Felix described a tendency of disparaging Romania, among his students, and in order to establish a rethinking on the subject, he had introduced a peculiar teaching method. Felix, who taught bachelor students in sociology, banned two words in the classroom: ‘gypsy’ and ‘mentality’. Felix prohibition of the ‘gypsy’ word was due to its evident political incorrectness, while forbidding the word ‘mentality’ was done in order to avoid the reproduction of common assumptions regarding Romanian society. His younger students

would often explain Romania's problem to be 'gypsies', and Romanian failures to be a result of 'Romanian mentality', which was a reasoning he wished to eradicate at an early stage of the learning process. Felix explained that these assumptions were common in Romania, and obstructed analytical and critical perspectives on Roma, Romanian history, and the current situation. The example from Felix' teaching confirms the ubiquity of these ideas, which I argue to be important to Romanian self-perception. The tendency of blaming Romanian mentality, which the students commonly did, also explains how Romanians justify their subordinate position in relation to 'the West'. In order to make these distinctive references clearer I will list some of the characteristics that Romanians often assigned to 'gypsies' in relation to themselves, and to Romanians in relation to an image of the 'civilized West':

'Gypsies'/Romanians: 'The West':

Dirty	Clean
Cheating	Trustworthy
Immutable	Changing
Uneducated	Educated
Backwards	Progressive
Lawless	Law-abiding
Lazy	Hard-working
Uncivilized	Civilized

The most interesting insight acquired from this set of contradictory characteristics, is the fact that Romanians implicitly positioned themselves as the opposite of the 'gypsy' characteristics, while seldom explicitly appropriating the positively loaded characteristics that they would ascribe to the West. This, I argue is where Professor Mițu's statement regarding Romanian racism becomes relevant: *"In Romania it is a matter about that your shit is worse than our shit."* This declaration highlights a tendency among Romanians of seeing themselves as rather 'shitty' too. If this observation is correct, that Romanians perceive themselves as subordinated and uncivilized 'Others' in a global hierarchy, then one might assume the

importance of having an anomalous ‘Other’ to distinguish oneself from inwardly. I am not implying this to be the sole explanation for Romanian ‘antiziganism,’ but as an important aspect of the relationship between Romanians and Roma minority. Further, this is another indication that the positioning I am accounting for has emerged in a context of fragmentation, alienation and unsettlement. Negativity towards Romania is, however, not only about self-contempt in an incoherent environment, but also concerns realities of uncertainty, in a capricious and corrupt system. Although I view these realities of uncertainty to be incorporated into self-contempt, I wish to clarify how the Romanian conditions appeared to my informants, and how they were emphasized in comparison to other countries.

Dreams of the West

A few days before my first trip to Transylvania I bumped into Florin on Dacia Boulevard. I told him that I was going to take the train to Sibiu. Florin hissed, *“Romanian trains are horrible.”* *“In what way?”* I asked, *“There is always something wrong with them, and remember to bring food because they don’t sell anything on board.”* Florin continued: *“You will like Sibiu. Western Romania has German influences, people work harder, they are more honest, and not as lazy as over here. Here in Bucharest we have more Balkan and Turkish influence, people are lazier and sneakier. The further east you go, the lazier the people.”*

Florin was not impressed with Romania in general, and he often declared that he would leave the country as soon as he got the chance. Florin was clearly biased to any country west of Romania, something made evident by the statement presented above. To associate capitalism and capitalist countries with diligence and innovation is a common, modern occurrence. These imaginaries of East and the West, may however be linked to an older legacy of divisions. Present-day, Romanian territories have been subordinated under various empires, such as the Roman, the Ottoman, and the Austrian-Hungarian. Struggles over these territories, have provided a basis for a mythical identity of Romania as having guarded the West from invaders (Engebrigtsen, 2007). Florin’s statement may therefore be linked all the way back to struggles between the Habsburg and the Ottoman empires, historical relations, which Engebrigtsen relates to the Romanian inferiority complex, in the hierarchy of nation states. Within this hierarchy, and in line with Florin’s view, Turkey and Arab countries are at the bottom, while Germany and Scandinavia are positioned at the top (Engebrigtsen, 2007:24).

In order to give a clearer example of the discourses that I have discussed, I will present an extract from an interview with Florin at an Italian restaurant in our neighborhood, complemented by an interview with his girlfriend Anita. Our conversations provide an understanding of how Romania is constantly compared to other and ‘better’ countries. Although ideas about Romania’s inferiority may have originated in a historical setting of ‘foreign rulers’, which Engebrigtsen refers to, I view these notions to be as much of a contemporary phenomenon. My urban middle-class informants easily accessed modern means of communication such as international media channels, the Internet, and cheap flights to other European capitals. In the section called national belonging, I will explain how these medias serve to reinforce and reproduce negative views on Romania. First, I will return to Florin and his reality of uncertainty. I had initiated the conversation by asking him about his ideas of Roma minority:

Florin: *“I read an article about gypsies, that they have their own laws and tribunals. It was for example illegal to steal from another gypsy, but not illegal to steal from others.”*

Me: *“So, you are implying that Roma ignore Romanian legislation?”*

Florin: *“Yes, but Romanians do neither so it does not really matter. There are, however, three things that Romanians would appreciate from gypsies: number one is education. That they would go to school continuously without interruption. Two, that they washed themselves, took care of themselves in that matter, and three, that criminality went down.”*

We continued talking about his dreams of leaving Romania:

Florin: *“I would leave Romania at any chance I got. There is nothing I would rather want.”*

Me: *“What are the main reasons for this?”*

Florin: *“Political reasons, and I would not raise children here, not with the current school system and healthcare. Nothing works here and it’s dirty.”*

Me: *“Where would you move?”*

Florin: *“Anywhere west, to Brazil or Belgium. I have family in Belgium, it is good over there.”*

Me: *"Have you been to Brazil?"*

Florin: *"No, but it seems to be a country that has everything."*

Me: *"Is there anything in particular that you would miss in case you moved?"*

Florin: *"Yes, I would miss the relaxed relationship to rules. I think western legislation can be too much, for example prohibiting smoking inside, it's about personal freedom."* (Florin who had been smoking throughout the whole conversation, lit another cigarette).

Florin's motives for leaving Romania were linked to his ideal future, based on an abstract idea about countries westwards that have everything. When reflecting on 'gypsies' and Romanians, equally ignoring the law, Florin smiled ironically. Then again, he dreaded having to go out for a smoke in case he moved. Ambiguity in relation to rules will be discussed further in the following section.

Florin's girlfriend Anita who studied dentistry, shared her boyfriend's dreams of leaving, her main reason was education:

"I am very unhappy with my university, they want to teach us about everything but they can't, the teachers are bad and they don't provide us with good material. And the fees are high, about a thousand euros per year, and five thousand euros for foreign students."

Anita was aggravated by the fact that rich foreigners could pay their way into and through university:

"After the revolution, medicine students started coming here from abroad, because foreigners get accepted easily, and all they have to do to pass the exams is to pay. It is so frustrating. And they have money, so when they have their degrees, they start up clinics here and employ Romanians to work for them."

Although Anita liked the thought of living in another European country, she worried about the way Romanians were perceived by other Europeans:

"I have a story about this. When Florin and I were in a shop in Paris to look for a t-shirt, we started talking to the shopkeeper. He seemed nice, but when he found out that we were Romanians he acted as if he didn't like us anymore, he got suspicious. I do not understand why there is such a focus on Romanians while there are so many other cultures in Paris!"

When I questioned whether Romanians really were as notorious as many of my informants claimed, both Anita and Florin insisted. They viewed this as a self-inflicted status, due to the fact that Romanians in fact often acted badly. The accounts of Florin and Anita mirror an unwieldy reality of corruption, defective educational systems, and poor healthcare. Florin's dream about moving anywhere west does, however, appear to be based on a rather obscure ideal, at least in comparison to his distinct description of Romania. The point to be made regarding this idealization of Western countries is that my urban middle-class informants would rather express an affiliation with the culture of other Europeans, than their own. Felix, like many of my other informants, was multilingual, he would read French academic works in the original language, and decorate his coffee table with British and French journals. Felix would also, only buy his clothes abroad, during work trips in other European capitals, which made his appearance a bit different from other Romanians. He spoke of Romanian men as lazy and complained about their shabby appearance, *"They are overweight at twenty, and wear worn jeans and ugly sneakers."* Felix thought that this problem was engendered by male chauvinism, *"They think that being a man is good enough. Men that don't care about their looks, they are despicable!"*

I dwelt primarily among the middle-class who strove towards this ideal of 'West European sophistication', which might explain my wonderment over accounts on the barbaric Romanian. As a Swedish woman, I am not used to having doors opened for me, being addressed as 'Miss', being escorted to the door, or have male informants walking on the outer side of the sidewalk to protect me from the cars. Before I came to Romania I had only seen this kind of courtesy in black and white movies. I did not encounter the barbaric Romanian during my travels round rural Romania either. My point is here, that the conception of Romania, as located on the lower part of the civilization ladder, enforces manners sought to contrast this image, and strict aversion towards behavior that is perceived to reproduce a sense of the uncivilized. My informants were very blunt in their disregard of what they considered bad manners, something that will be discussed in detail in chapter five. In the following section I will approach the subject of cheating and ambivalent sentiments in relation to this feature, which was perceived as an intrinsically Romanian characteristic by informants.

Cheating

The day before I left Bucharest, I gathered some people at a café where I would usually meet up with Alina, Maria and Felix. I had invited Florin, who showed up with Anita. The subject of leaving Romania was brought up yet again. Florin told me that he had seen an ad for a job in Sweden, and that he had felt tempted to apply, but that he would wait until Anita had finished her degree, *“As soon as we get the chance we will leave, Romania is not a place to raise children.”* Then he laughed:

“I listened to the radio in my car this morning. This new system has apparently been implemented to prevent students from cheating in elementary school. And because of this, between forty and fifty percent failed, and in some schools up to one hundred percent of the students failed! I laughed so hard when I heard this. When I was at the university I stopped studying after the first year, I passed all my exams and got my degree.”

Felix who had been busy correcting exams the last couple of weeks lifted his gaze from the other side of the table:

“I caught a student cheating recently. I heard a buzzing noise and saw that a girl was hiding a pair of headphones under her long hair. She admitted immediately, and I rejected her exam of course. If I catch her again, there will be severe consequences. I take these things very seriously, but few teachers report cheating. That’s why students are seldom expelled as a result of cheating. Teachers know when the students cheat.”

Florin countered:

“I am not so sure of that. I cheated in front of the strictest teachers, who would not have hesitated to expel me in case they caught me. I wrote on my shoes, on my leather bag, and my hands”

Florin continued:

“I know a joke: The first year, the teacher looked out of the window during the exam, he knocked on the window frame, and all of the students put away their notes and books. The second year, the teacher was looking out the window, then he cleared his throat and all of the students put away their notes and books. The third year, the teacher was looking out over the classroom, and no one was cheating. A student knocked on his desk, and the teacher looked out of the window. (Florin laughed) That is SO Romania!”

Florin's joke appears as a contradictory, self-fulfilling narrative. The story concerns one of the main reasons for his resignation with Romania, the educational system. At the same time, he gave an up-front description of how he had exploited it, and acquired a degree without studying. I am not implying that Romanians are cheaters; the statement regards only Florin. What is interesting here, are the conflicting values in Florin's account, which leads me where I wish to take this example. According to my observations, many of my Romanian informants identified with and accepted their concepts of negative Romanian traits. Not by acting badly, but by perceiving them as part of their identity. It was almost as if Florin thought that the act of relocating himself to a Western society would 'civilize' him. Next, I will direct the focus to the topic of national belonging, or rather the lack of thereof.

National Belonging

Gilman's concept is built on oppositions existing between enclaves within an ethno-religious group, rather than a phenomenon existing inwardly. Self-hatred, or self-contempt as I rather call it, in the Romanian case has the character of a shared notion, and is not necessarily the result of divisions within the group, but seems to be linked to an experience of unsettlement and fragmentation.

In Bucharest, I found nationalist sentiments to exist primarily in relation to minorities, while amongst Romanians, positively loaded nationalist sentiments seemed almost nonexistent. This, I claim, is connected to fragmentation with political and historical causes. Nationalism and ethnicity are generally interlinked, since nation states commonly draw their legitimacy and appeal by declaring to represent the interests of a certain ethnic group (Eriksen, 2010: 121). This can be applied to Romania, with regards to my informants, who belong to the majority group that dominates politically. This does, however, stand in contrast to the impending frustration and hostility I observed in the field. In order to solve the puzzle of Romanian self-contempt, a further discussion of nationalism is necessary.

My material contradicts in many ways common assumptions of how national identity and sentiments are shaped. Benedict Anderson's thoughts on the nation state are interesting, as they touch the sentiments that are connected to and provide for the reproduction of nationalism. Anderson defines the modern nation state as an "imagined political community," imagined, he claims, as limited and sovereign, and envisaged since its members never have,

nor will meet or see each other (Anderson, 2006: 6). Anderson argues that the concept of the nation state is a particularly forceful ideology, forceful enough for citizens to be willing to die for it (Anderson, 2006). My Romanian informants, however, often expressed powerlessness in relation to their lives and futures. As I have shown, 'Romanian failures' were somehow incorporated in ideas of what was considered Romanian, and in that sense also blamed on Romanians. While the political legitimacy that Anderson mentions is there, at least officially, the emotional force of nationalism seems lost. The question following Anderson's theory is thus; how forceful is the Romanian nation state in the imaginations of my informants? There is a set of topics, fruitful for uncovering the detachment I observed in relation to the Romanian nation state. Firstly, the political aspect, the powerlessness mentioned above, was often expressed in terms of a political alienation. Informants commonly stated an exhausted and ironic irritation over Romanian politicians, whom they referred to as corrupt, clown-like characters. So in that sense, the nation state as a superior representative of the interests of the masses was not a strong concept among informants. Felix, who was in the midst of establishing a leftist party, was therefore rather ambivalent about his political engagement. At the time, he refused to participate in broadcasted political debates because he would not, *"downgrade himself to the level of the discussions."* Felix worried about the upcoming elections. If his party would be successful, he would be forced to decide whether to dismiss or participate in a political system he did neither believe in nor trust.

The same judgments were made regarding Romanian media. Both Florin and Felix warned me about Romanian news channels and political debates: *"Don't even bother watching that crap."* (Florin). Florin, who helped install the TV in my apartment, made clear that I ought not to watch the Romanian news, and instead helped me to locate BBC and CNN. Anderson refers to the importance of "national print-languages" and "print-capitalism" in the reproduction and augmentation of nationalist sentiments by its potential of inexpensively distributing copies of the same information to the masses (Anderson, 2006: 40, 67). Eriksen, stresses, further, that newspapers, radio, TV and the Internet are additional means, vital to the channeling of nationalist sentiments (Eriksen, 2010: 127). In my view, one needs to take into account the globalization of media, which has created a 'broadcasting without borders'. The Internet is the most evident example of latter, where social forums serve to support an endless exchange of information. The globalization of media, I argue, enables people to be influenced and selective at the same time, and furthermore, rank channels of information according to their own convictions or interests. In Romania, which is a country of avid Internet users, the

transition from communist ‘print-censorship’, which was expanded during the later decades of Ceaușescu’s regime (Verdery, 1991:113-114), to modern technology seems to have backfired the channeling of nationalist sentiments, at least among the middle-class youth.

Having elaborated on the weak influence of Romanian politics and media on my informant group, I will proceed by discussing yet another aspect of the fragmented sense of belonging. Eriksen explains how Norwegian urban middle class during the nineteenth century constructed symbols of “Norwegianness” by reifying aspects of peasant culture (Eriksen, 2010: 122). This may be viewed as a part of the nationalist project, in creating a sense of solidarity between the urban and rural population, between rich and poor citizens (Eriksen, 2010: 123). These types of romanticized symbols of peasant culture were recurrent representations of the authentic Romanian spirit, and an object for nationalist sentiments during communism (Verdery, 1991:56). A large part of the Romanian population is still rural. My informants would, although many were themselves from the countryside, express their distance from rural communities. Felix parents, who were retired, spent the warm half of the year in their home village west of Bucharest. Felix would reluctantly visit them, even though he loathed the countryside, “*It’s all brown mud, animals, alcoholism and men beating their wives,*” he said with a smile. Gigi, who had just recently moved to Bucharest from his home village, said with reference to his girlfriend, “*The countryside is a dangerous place for girls, they can’t move around freely.*” My informants would commonly frown upon persons that behaved ‘uncivilized’ or dressed ‘tacky’, and accordingly refer to them as ‘peasants’. In most cases it was evident that my urban informant group did not wish to identify with the rural population, which they perceived as backward, comical or merely uninteresting. Thus, the peasant as a unifying symbol seems to have faded considerably since the prime era of Romanian nationalism, estimated from the mid-nineteenth century to the 1970s (Engebrigtsen, 2007: 29).

In May, I visited Alina and Maria’s home village over a weekend. I called Alina, who was already at her parent’s house to announce that I was coming the next day: “*Oh my God, I can’t believe that you are actually coming to Sat!*” she exclaimed, I could hear Maria giggling hysterically in the background. Alina and Maria seemed both excited and nervous when they picked me up at the bus stop, as if they were about to reveal something secret and intimate. The village and its surroundings were, in my view, a sight to be proud of: green hills with grazing cattle surrounded by a lush forest with flowers and wild raspberries. The weekend

was a nice break from Bucharest's racket, and consisted more or less of being spoiled with food and home-brewed țuică (plum brandy) by the two families. During a tour through the village, Maria and Alina explained that due to the lack of mutual interests, they had lost contact with almost all of their childhood friends who had remained in the village. Most of them had married shortly after high school and were preoccupied with children and family life by now. The contrast between urban and rural life was, therefore, too wide to bridge. In chapter five I will return to this topic when discussing how the urban youth distanced themselves from lifestyles and manners connected to rurality. I will now revisit the discourse of the civilized and the uncivilized, which also, yet implicitly carries notions of urbanity and rurality.

Civilized and Uncivilized

At the end of June, I packed all of my things and cleaned the studio apartment thoroughly so that I would be able to move out before the first of July, as according to the contract that I had signed in January. I had polished the windows and cleaned every ledge of the apartment, "the Scandinavian way". Alina had offered me to stay the last week together with Maria and her, in their apartment north of the city center. Mariana, my landlady was surprised when I handed her the keys to the shining apartment. *"You could have stayed the last week for free, and you shouldn't have bothered cleaning!"* One of the last days I suggested that Maria, Alina and I would discuss the subject of negative self-perception among Romanians. We sat by the table in the small kitchen, with a pot of coffee and a pack of cigarettes. Alina and Maria's accounts comprised many of the aspects of Romanian self-perception, which I had observed up to that point. Following are excerpts from the interview:

I: *"What about the people that complain about Romania, who are they?"*

Alina:

"For example academics without opportunities. It's a sad case, because we do not value our valuable people. Our nation is behaving like newly rich, spending without values, it's been chaotic ever since we got democracy, but I think we are on the right track, it's just that we are not used to standing up for our rights."

Alina continued:

“I am a medium person, a middle class person and I have managed to surround myself with good, creative people. I think it is wonderful now that we are living in a country that allows new things. But there is a lot to be done for it to become like civilized countries. There are those that bad mouth Romania because they are pessimistic, but in reality they are fake and stupid. Then there are those that are unfortunate, poor and sick. There are also those who leave the country to explore.”

I: *“Unfortunate, in what way are they?”*

Alina: *“Well, they haven’t been able to find the right job for instance.”*

Maria countered:

“I disagree, it’s like the fairy tale with the elephant that has been tied up for ten years, and when it’s finally liberated it is not moving. People are accustomed to old ideas and ways of behaving. For example at work, they complain but they don’t do anything about the problems. People do not perceive things as their responsibility, which might be a result of the communist period.”

I: *“People speak about civilized and uncivilized here, how would you define civilized?”*

Alina:

“Civilized is like two persons. The civilized has a personality characterized by awareness of how he or she lives, and who treats others well, and is growing up in that sense. A nation child, that grows. Civilized countries are like grown ups, with responsibility, coherence, while we are immature.”

I: *“So it can be used as a term for describing people in Romania?”*

Alina:

“Yes, and it is also about the more you see and speak to people, and about respecting other people’s borders. I, for example, used to be a lot less civilized than I am now. I think it’s about maturity, to be nice and a nice person.”

Maria continued:

“Civilized is like countries long ago, when it was about progress for people, for people that have covered basic needs, and do not have too many problems, that are educated, polite, respectable. That can be about anything from not throwing things in the streets, to not being loud, I guess it’s associated with common sense, which in turn also is about being able to do what one likes.”

I: *“and what is your idea about common sense?”*

Maria:

“Not bothering others, having a way of acting in society, you know the basic stuff from having dinner, throwing paper on the streets, talking loud, being rude. I consider lack of common sense to entail smelling bad and the lack of education.”

Alina added: *“Communism left us back in time, we were not so creative, but the new generation are more open, we play with communism, we have exhibitions.”*

Many of the elements I perceive to be relevant in relation to Romanian self-contempt were brought up and pinpointed in the conversation with Maria and Alina. First and foremost, the idea of Romania as uncivilized was brought to the fore in terms of immature and childlike. According to Alina, this model could as well be applied to a person like herself. Maria’s account of the civilized and commonsense was also related to the individual. During fieldwork, I observed how references to civilized/uncivilized could vary depending on the person and situation. Engebriksen stresses this variation of significances, but suggests the common denominator in the Romanian discourse on civilization to concern “outward bodily propriety” and people’s conduct in society (Engebriksen, 2007:24). The latter is illustrated in Maria’s statement regarding common sense, *“Not bothering others, having a way of acting in society..”* and a lack of this equals, *“smelling bad and the lack of education.”* I view this personalization of civilized and uncivilized to be particularly significant as it correlates with Romanians’ identification with failures, which is one of my main interests in this thesis. It is important not to oversee Alina’s hopefulness with regards to the creative spirit of her generation. Alina was one out of many young Romanians I met, who at times challenged the negativity towards Romania. An example of this was at an art exhibition where Alina and I were caught in a discussion with a Romanian arts dealer who had recently returned from Spain, where he had lived for over fifteen years. He had started up a gallery in my

neighborhood and complained about Romanian art: “There has been no evolution of art here! No surrealism, no modernism, Romania has nothing, what a dump!” Alina, who became agitated by his complaints, responded, “If you think this country is so damn hopeless, feel free to leave then!” With this account, I would like to show that negative views regarding Romania were not absolute, and were often ambivalent. Alina’s response to the art dealer’s lunge against Romania represents a resignation with all the negativity, although many who felt this way tended also, to take part in, and reproduce latter.

I have described how notions of civilized/uncivilized could be represented in individuals, in between ethnic groups, and with regards to nation states. I have also shown how progress and future, are related to creativity and individual responsibility.

Concluding Remarks

Through exploring discourses on Romania I have attempted to create an understanding of self-contempt I observed in the context. As shown, informants actively took on the role of the ‘Other’ in conversations regarding Romania. The tendencies of locating Romania within a civilization hierarchy may be linked to a tradition of ranking West and East, where Romania appears as an ambivalent middle category. The negative characteristics assigned to ‘gypsies’, and, in other situations, to the East, are absorbed as Romanian traits in relation to an idealized image of the ‘civilized West’. These characteristics are further applied to and reproduced by Romanian individuals, and therefore somehow perceived as inherent, static traits.

Chapter 5: The Romanian Other

In this chapter I will present conversations regarding the music genre *manele*¹⁰ and a loosely defined category of people, *cocalari*. The aim is to put forth by what means positioning takes form, and to create an understanding of the standards used in these processes. By presenting empirical material, such as situations and discourses related to these objects for disdain: *manele* and *cocalari*, I wish to explain their significance for my young middle class informants. I will clarify how the *cocalar*, which was described as the epitome of an ill-mannered person, becomes an additional ‘Other’ in the context, a category in relation to which my informants proclaimed their distance. It will become clear how this additional ‘Other’, in the views of my informants is permeated with the negative uncivilized traits discussed in previous chapters, and therefore appear as “matter out of place”, and a threat in terms of a source of cultural pollution (Douglas, 1997). Notions of authenticity and morality are important in these processes, serving both as markers and legitimizers when determining what should be considered good and bad.

Contextualizing Distinctions

Romania, in many ways, forms an opposition to the solid French class structure described in Bourdieu’s *Distinction* (2010). Distinctions are indeed being made through preference in Bucharest. Those preferences cannot however be argued to have been reproduced throughout a well established class structure as in Bourdieu’s French case. The prolonged socialistic dictatorship effectively deconstructed previous structures, and hindered the development of a civil society. Thus, a relevant question following this historical glance is: Where is Romania now? In 1990, Katherine Verdery speculated what the eventual outcomes of the transition from communism would be. In addition to more obvious changes such as privatization and multi-party system that it took Romania many years to complete, she posed the following question: “To what extent have socialist ideas about classlessness and equality entered into people’s thinking, despite their categorical rejection of socialism overall, and what effects will that have?” (Verdery, 1990: 432).

¹⁰ A contemporary Romani music genre which carries Oriental and Balkan influences

Like most places today, Romania has not been able to escape the information flow of the ‘global era’, and its concepts, ideas and ideologies have long been transmitted to its citizens. There are, however, different ways of receiving and digesting imported concepts, and the choice of how to do so, has consequences in differentiation processes similar to the ones occurring in Bourdieu’s class society. Since these cannot be derived out of a clear case of class reproduction, I suggest that they reflect a striving for clearer borders and a need for community building in the context. Matters of taste appeared vital to my middle class informants, and legitimized overt expressions of harsh disdain for certain people and places.

Fragmentation, and at times hostility between citizens implies a continued lack of civil society, or sense of community in Romania. I am also proposing another legacy of the communist era to further highlight the complexity of the present context. Images of a shared past, where classlessness prevailed, seem to persist in the notions of younger generations. Further, in a society where communal sentiments are scarce, these images serve to create an idea about equal starting points, a springboard into the new times, where ‘freedom of choice’ can take you anywhere. I suggest that this particular mix of ideologies could be one possible explanation as to why the ‘children of the transition’ show a certain tendency to judge their fellow citizens. Unlike their parental generation, young Romanians are presented with a range of possible choices in life that they parents never had, which in reality are not available for all. The Romanian economy and governance does not provide for a general welfare or for equal opportunities to the extent that this could be possible. Romania is, and has been, a country of great disparities, before and long after the transition. As I have already mentioned, the disdain for distasteful behavior and style is also clearly linked to pervading notions of the ‘civilized’, which evoked these types of punitive judgments of people whom were seen to represent and reproduce the ‘uncivilized Romanian’. The music genre manele, which I will account for in the following section, is a perfectly good example of a ‘source of the uncivilized’.

Manele

“Me and Maria are tipsy and we are listening to manele. Where are you? You should be here sweets, dancing like a gypsy with us! Put this in your paper: some manele and gypsy music speaks to the heart full of sorrow, and yes, it relieves it and makes it light! Fără numar!”¹¹

I received this message from Alina a few months after I had left Bucharest. It is a confession of guilty pleasure: listening to manele. I have drawn upon the modern Romani music genre manele when developing my insights on identity making in Bucharest. In contact with this notorious genre I came across conflicting images of the ‘Other’, in this case not only represented by ‘gypsies,’ but also by an amorphous group of people commonly referred to as *cocalari*. The category of the *cocalari* indicates that stigmas, other than the ethnic prevail in Romania, even though they appear intertwined.

Contemporary manele, which I am referring to, is a Romani music genre carrying Oriental and Balkan influences. Manele arose my curiosity early on, owing to the stark sentiments expressed about it. As a discourse and social arena it proved to reveal aspects on identity making processes among my informants. The genre was commonly described with unconcealed despise as commercial music with disgraceful lyrics about sex, money and power. Despite manele’s commercial success within Romania, I did not encounter a single positive reaction when bringing up the topic. The general dispraise of the genre indicated its potential, as a prolific topic to explore and understand identity making in the context.

I was introduced to manele by Florin, who had been sent over to my apartment by his mother yet again, this time with a gigantic television to be installed. He arrived squeezed in between the walls of the miniature elevator, and needed a few minutes to catch his breath before he grabbed the remote control and guided me through the range of channels. Florin recommended a few renowned international news channels and warned me about their Romanian counterparts, explaining that Romanian programs claiming some sort of seriousness came out as parodies. Florin advised strongly against two particular music channels since they primarily offered, “idiotic manele music”, dedicated to “stupid cocalari people.”

I knew nothing about manele or *cocalari* at the time. When I asked Felix, he explained that there were particular manele clubs, “ghastly places and possibly dangerous”. Felix said

¹¹ Slang phrase common in manele songs, which means “without counting the bills” or “spending without care”

that he could probably take me to one, but only for “professional purposes”. Felix detested manele as much as Florin did, and, although I pleaded, it would take long before I got the opportunity to visit a manele club. My first impressions of the slang word *cocalari*, was that it referred to someone considered bad or ‘tacky’. In the quest for common denominators in its significance, I asked some of my informants to define *cocalari*.

Cocalari

Investigating the literal significance of the word *cocalar* appeared a little tricky. Valentina, a Roma informant explained the derivation of the word like this:

“Cocalar - comes from the word "cocalo" which means bone. So, Cocalar were the Roma who worked with bones, making hairbrushes. But with the rise of the modern society they lost their profession. In modern times and in the urban language, people use this word to describe people who listen to manele, wear lots of gold, and that are loud etcetera.”

Valentina’s explanation of the derivation of *cocalar* implies a relationship between Roma and *cocalari*. As will be shown in this section, the usage of the word does not refer exclusively to ‘gypsies’, but to people who listen to this modern Romani genre in general. *Cocalari*, which is the plural inflection of *cocalar*, could, according to Felix also be translated as ‘rainbow’ with reference to the striking clothing of *cocalar* persons. I am, however, more interested in the discursive contents, than the literal significance or the derivation of the word. I will hereby continue with Florin’s description of *cocalari*:

“Well, the term you are referring to does not have a clear definition as far as I know. In general it refers to the kind of person, which is not necessarily a gypsy, who proudly displays an astounding amount of bad taste, lack of any kind respect for anything other than other ‘cocalari’. They like to show off any kind of wealth they might have, real or imaginary, and view people that work, that appreciate culture, that don’t steal or lie or cheat to make a quick buck, as idiots. They are the kind of people that, if they have something like 1000\$ in their possession, will immediately think about taking pictures of themselves with that money so they can show off to their “enemies” as they call it.”

Evident in Florin’s description is his own ideas of bad taste, associated with spending and displaying money, stealing and cheating, and not appreciating culture. Apparent is also

the interlinkages between this description and general ideas of the uncivilized. Florin's statement regarding money correlates in particular with Alina's idea of Romania as uncivilized, quoted in chapter four: *"behaving like newly rich, spending without values."* Caldeira accounts for a similar tendency among upper and middle classes in São Paulo, who commonly considered the poor to have a "squander mentality", and to be unable to consume properly (Caldeira, 2000: 69). In this sense, the upper and middle classes denied the poor features commonly linked to capitalism and modernity, for example rationality, saving, and investing (Caldeira, 2000: 70). As will be shown throughout this chapter, a propensity of denouncing the consumption of lower classes correlates well with the Romanian case.

Petrus, a young sociology student went further in his written explanation, by making explicit the kinds of behaviors he associated with *cocalari*:

"First of all, you have to understand, or at least try to understand, that the term 'cocalar' and the other one 'manele' go together. Another tip: don't try to translate manele into English. I was at a film festival where someone had translated manele as 'gypsy pop music'. But it doesn't have anything in common with pop music nor gypsy music. It's simply a tune that repeats itself, with a few catchy verses that don't necessarily make any sense. Also, there are two types of listeners: if you listen to this genre on a regular basis, and start humming verses consciously, not just to mock their performers, then you are a cocalar. The other type is people who listen to these tunes just to have a little bit of fun mocking gypsy/lower or working class people. Listening to a manea¹ at a party is harmless, but constantly listening to it makes you despised by people with a higher education. And now, let's talk about cocalari. I presume that you have understood that one of the rules that makes one a cocalar is repeatedly listening to manele. Another distinct trademark is a very very low taste in fashion. Most of them buy clothes with different brands on their shirts, pants, and underwear etcetera. By doing so they try to make it seem like they actually own an Armani sweater. But the truth is they can't afford one. If in some cases, they have the money to purchase such merchandise, they buy the originals but don't have the proper education to match the styles. For example: sunglasses, expensive suit jacket, ripped jeans and sport shoes. Most of them put their mobile phones on speaker mode so that they can be heard, or play music on public transportation loudly, chew chewing gum in church. You get the idea. Cocalar is used to describe an ill-mannered person.

1 Manele song

Petrus made a clear distinction between pop music, ‘gypsy music’ and manele. Most of my informants listened to Western pop or indie rock, and shared a fascination for traditional Romani music (referred to by Petrus as “gypsy music”). It was legitimate to listen to old-fashioned Romani music, because of its authentic, traditional and folkloric status, while manele was perceived as a decline in Romanian music evolution. According to Petrus it was only acceptable to listen to a manea (manele song) with the intention to mock lower classes and ‘gypsies’. He described manele nearly as an epidemic: if you find yourself enjoying and humming a manea, you have been infected and you have become ‘cocalarized’. As if the music would instantly make you ill mannered. Petrus also made a distinction between real and fake when speaking of clothing, which, yet again, links the discourse to notions of authenticity. He did implicitly link poverty to a lack of originality, and education as a condition for style.

Petrus closed the email with one final advice:

“Last tip, don't give money to gypsies in the streets. They lie about being orphans or something like that. They're not like Hugo's Miserables or Vittorio de Sica's Neorealism. Gypsies begging in your country or the rest of Europe are, and always will be thieves and scums. So, watch your purse when you see them.”

At first I was confused by Petrus switch of subjects at the end of the email, but on second thought I recognized its affiliation with the discourse of the “scum of Romania.” As a matter of fact, Petrus had not switched subjects, but simply turned the coin upside down. While ‘gypsies’ are the obvious ‘Others’ in Romania, there is also a Romanian ‘Other’, represented by the *cocalar*. While ‘gypsies’ represent an alien ‘Other’, the *cocalari* serve as an additional object of disdain for the Bucharest youth, in terms of the ‘uncivilized Romanian’.

Maria’s description of *cocalari* was not far from her definition of ‘uncivilized’, although *cocalari* was clearly gendered, since the word is masculine. In order to eradicate confusions I should mention that there is a female equivalent of *cocalar*: *prințesă* (princess) or *prințese* in plural. People would, however, most often speak of *cocalari*, as a group reference, including both women and men. Maria’s definition went as follows:

“Cocalari for me are low educated men with strong alpha instincts that try to get attention and respect through fake, kitsch or opulent elements: status symbols like cars, from tuned

second hand ones for the poorer exponents to the latest versions of luxury cars. This image has to be spiced up with gadgets or branded clothing, from fake designer clothing to the latest trends with way too visible labels. They don't respect the elementary rules of common sense and usually try to show off and accentuate their flawless manhood.”

Yet again, the definition concerns materiality, lack of authenticity and bad manners, and this time referred to in terms of common sense. In the interview regarding negative self-perception in chapter four, Maria drew a line between ‘civilized’ and ‘commonsense’, which amongst other things entailed “having a way of acting in society.” Alina’s definition was similar to Maria’s:

“Cocalar is someone whose bad taste crosses the norms of commonsense, in the way that the cocalar manages to make a parade of his bad taste and, sometimes, even impose it on others. An example of this would be a guy listening to music in the bus, loudly, on his phone, or wearing a t-shirt with Gucci written big with Swarovski in the front. They are not a real danger to society though; they are more like exotic birds that you want to study. More dangerous to society than cocalari are the narrow-minded snobs who would call someone a cocalar just because they don’t fit into their worlds, ideas or principles. I have seen cases”.

Alina was more reserved in her critique of this category, and did in fact direct critique towards ‘snobs’. The “exotic bird”-metaphor is in line with Felix ‘rainbow’ translation, and does nevertheless express Alina’s distance to *cocalari* people. I may conclude with certainty that the connection between *cocalari* and *manele* is evident, which makes ‘gypsies’ an inevitable part of the *cocalari* discourse, as the *manelists*¹² and the innovators of the genre are indeed Roma. *Cocalari*, however, seem to refer to all people supporting *manele* which in turn infers characteristics related to concepts of the ‘uncivilized’ as for example uneducated and ill-mannered. Having proved the connection between *manele* and *cocalari*, I wish to proceed by exploring the world of *manele*, in order to uncover causes for its notoriety.

Interpreting Manele

In line with Bourdieu (2010), it is clear that self-restraint in relation to taste was a strategy for status upheaval among my middle class informants in Bucharest. In the introduction to the

¹² Manele musicians

chapter, I mentioned that ways of digesting or appropriating imported values to be significant in identity making processes. In this section it will become apparent how values in manele lyrics and performances bear connections to crude capitalist ideals, mediated and translated into a Romanian setting. I will base this discussion primarily on an article in *CriticAtac*, a Romanian net journal, written by Adi Schiop, a local linguist. The editors describe the journal as “a social, intellectual and political critique group.” Although most writers are scholars, I wish to approach Schiop as an informant, since the article has not been peer reviewed.

In the article, titled “How the Romanian Elite Buried Manele: A Story with a Rainbow” (my translation), Schiop explains that, while old-style manele favored themes such as love, children, family and the hardships of life, contemporary manele commonly deals with capitalist topics such as wealth, trickery, distrust and women as commodities (Schiop, 2011). Schiop thereafter proceeds with an analysis of the contents of manele songs. Amongst other songs, he studies the lyrics of the hit, “Banii, Banii” (“Money, Money”) by Denisa. The song goes: “Without money you have no name,” and “Without money you are nobody.” Schiop reasons that manelists have incorporated the main principle of capitalism: “poverty as the ultimate disgrace,” and stresses that in a capitalist world, poverty exceeds the ethnic stigma (Schiop, 2011).



Album cover to the left with title “Manele, Money, Women”, and singer Denisa in the middle of the back row (<http://odimusic.net/download/17685-manele-bani-femei.html>). Album cover to the right with title “Manele of Soul” (http://www.muzicaveche.net/muzica-albume/Manele-De-Suflet-2011-Album-Original_13206/).

Maneas (manele songs) often tell the story of how a singer made her/his way out of poverty, a narrative similar to the myth of the American dream. Schiop, therefore argues that the manele audience, and manelists themselves are naïvely embracing foreign capitalist and liberal values. He comments that the current manele thematic, ironically enough, came into existence during the worst years of the Romanian recession (1996-2000), while the pessimistic mentality that pervaded in Romania during these years, are paradoxically absent in the optimistic manele narrative. Schiop argues that manele owes its success to an alteration in perception among Romanians. He refers to twenty long years of recession before the prosperity curve in the late nineties, which he argues created the downfall of the communist regime. In Schiop's view, the revolution was a response to a promised prosperity that never came, and not necessarily brought forth by demands for freedom of speech. The economy was therefore an incentive for Romanians' interest and envy of the West, and as socioeconomic differences increased, the idolization of capitalism took root (Schiop, 2011).

Manele narratives often portray a strong protagonist envied by the less fortunate, as the album *"Without Competition"*, by Costi and Adrian (2000) portrays (Schiop, 2011). The same was reflected in Florin's statement, *"They like to show off to their enemies as they like to call it."* This boasting personality was viewed as vulgar and primitive by my informants. Schiop refers to this as a fear of 'manelization', which explains why the genre has been excluded from Romanian public media. Manele has, accordingly, not been accepted in 'cultural discourse' in Romania. Schiop explains that manele has annoyed both moderate followers of national-communism, that have perpetuated archaist ideals, favoring folkloric music, and have thereby considered manele as a source of cultural 'pollution', which is also reflected in the statements of my informants. Manele has further, been a nuisance to anticommunist elites, who according to Schiop, are sentimentally clinging on to a false image of the splendor of the aristocratic interwar "Little Paris" (Micul Paris), and view manele as a threat to the westernization of Romania (Schiop, 2011). Schiop, describes Roma elites to perpetuate an embarrassed silence regarding manele, further, that this group rather prefer their fiddlers as cultural representatives (Schiop, 2011).

It is obvious that Schiop is vexed by the praisal of the authentic and traditional, and the general disinterest in a living, contemporary phenomenon. The article gives a rather biased perspective, but corresponds well with my informants fear of 'manelization'. There

are, however, a few points I wish to add to the discussion, which will be done in the following section.

The Fear of ‘Manelization’

Schiop sees economic factors as an important explanation for manele’s widespread success, and acknowledges the disregard for the genre to be linked to an elitist idealizing of a sophisticated past. Romanian hip-hop, which is a rather new phenomenon, has gained positive attention among the same groups that fear a “manelization” of Romania. Marcel, and his artist friends, who despised manele, spoke approvingly about Romanian hip-hop groups such as Parazitii (The Parasites). Romanian hip-hop lyrics commonly revolve around similar themes and ideals as manele. The hip-hop lyrics are, however, generally more frank, while manele deal with, for instance, sexual topics metaphorically. While manele, was invented in Romania, the hip-hop genre was imported from America, after achieving a widespread, and global success. Schiop’s explanation of this contradiction is that the Romanian ‘progressive elite,’ tend to accept concepts, which have already been approved in the West.

Schiop’s explanation is credible, as the general tendency is to downgrade Romania in relation to the West. There are, according to my view, some other important factors at stake. Firstly, I view the fear of ‘manelization’ to be linked to an anxiety regarding social hierarchy, which concerns ethnicity as much as class. The cultivating of the proud and rich protagonist, that takes place in the manele world, inverts notions and markers of class and ethnicity. As followers of the genre, which, according to my informants, belong to lower classes, impersonate this self-confident and glamorous protagonist, they appear anomalous to the middle class, and become the detestable *cocalari*.

The website *cocalari.com*, was created for mocking people considered to be *cocalari*. Informants, who recommended it to me, would scroll through the website in order to get a good laugh. The site displays pictures of persons considered to be *cocalari*. The images are sorted by themes, such as “*cocalari periculosi*” (dangerous *cocalari*), “*cocalari gay*” (gay *cocalari*), *prințese* (princesses), and *prostie* (stupidity). These pictures are retrieved from web pages and social forums such as Facebook, where persons on these pictures, or their friends have uploaded them. There is one series of pictures called “*mister teracota*” (Mister terracotta), with photos of men posing in front of tiled stoves, common to Romanian houses in

rural areas. These pictures and many others on the website are taken inside of houses typical to the Romanian countryside, with light green or blue-limed walls, adorned with textile mats. The *cocalari* discourse could, therefore, also linked to tensions between the urban and the rural. As I mentioned in chapter four, my informants would distance themselves from rurality, and commonly frown upon ‘peasants’, which they perceived as tacky and misbehaved. The notion of the peasant is therefore interlinked with the *cocalari*, in constituting the ‘uncivilized’, and also the rural Romanian. The humble and robust peasant in the nationalist narrative from earlier times, which was mentioned in the previous chapter, appears to have been lost in exchange for the unruly *cocalari*.

In my view, the *cocalar* also constitutes a threat to a broader social order in the perceptions of my informants. As I have accounted for in earlier chapters, Romanians do commonly arrange themselves in terms of a subordinated race in relation to the West. This inferiority, although negatively loaded seems to be important in their structuring of the world. In other words, Romanians are not supposed to place themselves “on top of the world,” which manelists and *cocalari* are doing by bragging about wealth and playing music loudly on the bus. The following section presents an empirical example from a manele club that I eventually got to visit.

Millionaire Club

In Bucharest there are several manele clubs, amongst them one particularly reputed, Millionaire Club, which I eventually visited on a couple of occasions. Since none of my informants were big manele fans they were not easily persuaded. I was told that Millionaire Club was a ‘tacky’ and possibly dangerous place due to mafia activities, which they claimed took place at the club. Daniela, Maria, Alina and Marcel eventually agreed to come along, perceiving it as a comical adventure:

We entered and passed a line of enormous guards with shaved, bulky heads, skintight black t-shirts revealing dense muscles on the upper arms, black suit pants and leather shoes. I thought to myself that these guys resembled the Hollywood version of Eastern European assassins. Some of them were resting on chairs and others were moving around the club with their arms swinging far from their torsos. It was a Thursday night and the restaurant, which had walls covered by red, silky tapestry and big, golden-framed mirrors, was almost empty

when we entered the room. A waitress dressed in a short skirt, blouse and a vest told us that it was only five minutes until the band was on, and in a few moments the guests started filling up the room. A woman with long black hair entered the stage followed by a group of musicians. Daniela nodded with her gaze fixed on the female singer and commented ironically: "I love the layers." Daniela was referring to the love handles that were visible under the tight t-shirt of the female singer. Then she added less sarcastically, "They are so comfortable with their bodies." Vanesa (the singer) seemed both comfortable and confident, addressing the audience with a strong and powerful voice sounding through the deficient sound system, "sus, sus, sus!" (up, up, up!).

In all her irony Daniela had highlighted a paradox; In comparison to my female, middle class informants, striving to compete career and look-wise with reference to a western, globalized ideal of the woman (slim, career oriented, yet feminine, and soft), Vanesa appeared as a counterpart. Her confident appearance reminded me of African American jazz singers in the early 20th century, who, despite their ethnic stigma, and presumably even spurred by it, performed with a self-confidence contrasting the Victorian ideal woman, whose remnants can be traced among middle and upper class women in Western societies. Petruța Mîndruț, argues that the freedom that came with the fall of communism, has been experienced primarily "on the site of the body" (2006: 13). The 'opening up', allowed an influx of uncensored images of "Western bodies", and simultaneously, women's magazines with 'feminine education' on their agendas increased in numbers. Feminine beauty has according to Mîndruț, become more body-focused, and viewed as a personal resource since the demise of communism. The feminine ideal during latter, was characterized by women's primary roles as committed citizen, while on the other hand, being deprived of sexuality, as women's reproductive capacity was viewed as part of a nationalist project (2006:15).

Everyone did, however, agree that Vanesa was talented, even my neighbor Marcel who sat rigid and defensive in his chair admitted, "she is good." He had been against the plan of visiting the club all along and seemed uncomfortable most of the time. He reminded me that the place was unsafe, and threw nervous glances over his shoulder towards the guards. Maria and Alina did not seem scared, and giggled about the fact that they were actually in a manele club. Maria, "This reminds me of our crazy high school days, when we would try anything, EVEN manele clubs!" After the concert, we decided to leave. When we got close to the entrance, I saw Vanesa sitting with a group of girls at a table by the window. I

walked up to her, introduced myself and thanked her for the concert. Vanesa explained that she was not a manele singer by choice, and that she in fact preferred singing other genres, such as Mariah Carey and jazz. She explained that, “manele is the only way to survive as a musician, Romanians want manele.”

The evening at the club reflects ambiguous sentiments related to the manele arena. Daniela's comment regarding Vanesa's bodily appearance was sarcastic, but also revealed a fascination for her self-assured and confident presence. The example also reflects the fear that the place invoked in Marcel. In the next section I will account for my second meeting with Vanesa, to present the perspective of a manele singer.

The Lăutar and the Manelist

Approximately a week after the evening at Millionaire Club, I met up with Vanesa at a shopping mall in Militar, a residential area about a ten-minute ride from the city center. Earlier that day I had told Sarah, who I met over lunch, that I was going to see Vanesa in the evening. Sarah gave her approval, but seemed a little concerned, *“Be careful, and stay in public arenas while you are with her.”* Sarah, seldom expressed herself in a racist manner, but I assume that she in this particular situation and in her concern for my wellbeing could not help but give way to her prejudices against Roma.

I was supposed to meet Vanesa inside the shopping mall, which was located close to her grandmother's place where she was staying at the moment. It took a while before we found each other:

Vanesa gave me two Romanian kisses, one on each cheek and inquired me about the taxi ride, how much I had paid and which way the driver had chosen to take from my apartment to the mall. She had a worried expression on her face as if she expected that the driver had tried to scam me.

Throughout the evening that followed, Vanesa was very protective, and made sure that I did not pay for anything I ordered. Romanians are often suspicious of each other, Sarah was suspicious of Vanesa, and Vanesa was suspicious of the driver, and more or less anyone who approached me during the evening. I wish to stress that this distrust appeared an enigma, as I was overwhelmed with the hospitality and helpfulness I kept encountering in Bucharest.

Vanesa was born into a *lăutar* family. The *lăutari* belong to an ancient tradition, where the musical profession is inherited from father to son throughout generations. She explained that her father was a jazz musician, and her mother who had passed away early, had been “*the best singer ever.*” The *lăutari* have occupied an ambiguous position in Romanian folkloristic tradition, being the masters and preservers of the Romanian art of epic song on one hand, while at the same time being subordinated in line with their ethnic identity (Beissinger, 1991: 7-8).

All of the manelists that I met during the fieldwork called themselves *lăutari*, a profession highly valued between both Romanians and Roma, contrasted by their devalued status as manelists, which is as contradictory as the role of the traditional *lăutar*. When I asked Vlad, who I had met during the bus trip from Iași, whether he considered himself a *lăutar*, he pointed at his mother standing by the kitchen bench and said, “*Go on, and ask my mother, she will say; ‘Vlad is a lăutar’.*”

Vlad was proud of his occupation and described how he had learnt to play his main instrument, the drums: “*I would watch my stepfather while he did simple rhythms: mtchka, mtchka. I would listen and repeat it, and in no time I was far better than him.*” Vlad made a living by playing in various bands, amongst them a *Gypsy-Balkan*¹³ group, “*It is hard to be a musician in Romania, although I prefer other genres. I have to play manele at times.*”

Vanesa’s boyfriend Tiger, who joined us at the mall, was a pianist from a *lăutar* family, educated at the conservatory in Bucharest. Tiger, who composed songs for Vanesa, expressed his irritation over Romanians: “*Gypsies made up the manele fusion, because they knew it would sell. Romanians don’t appreciate our refined musical skills anymore.*” The demand for manele was, according to Tiger, a Romanian one: “*There is no interest for music in Romania. But the gypsies, we are born with music, it’s in our blood!*” “*How so?*” I asked, whereby, Vanesa took over, “*Saskia, who are the flamenco musicians in Spain?*” “*Gitanos,*” I answered. “*Exactly!*” she exclaimed: “*They are gypsies. We are allover the world, even Puff Daddy in the US is a gypsy.*”

The conversation with Vanesa and Tiger gave another perspective on manele. Both claimed that the innovation of the genre was strategically planned by Roma to satisfy a

¹³ A genre characterized by its mix of Romani, Balkan and Rock music

demand among Romanians. This corresponds somewhat with Schiop's idea regarding an alteration of perception among Romanians. According to Vanesa and Tiger, manele was simply a response to new demands that this alteration of perception brought about. It is not possible to determine what came first, the manelist or the *cocalari*, but I agree with Schiop in viewing these as important contemporary phenomenon worth exploring. Tiger and Vanesa's reference to "playing on demand," is also interesting with regards to the history of *lăutar* musicians as serfs or taxpaying entertainers for the Romanian nobility from the 14th century until the abolishment of Roma slavery in 1856 (Beissinger, 1991:18, 24, 25). "Playing on demand," can therefore be viewed as a phenomenon with ancient traits. Vanesa's identification with the African American rapper Puff Daddy is interesting, as both Roma and African Americans have a history of slavery and stigmatization.

Vanesa sang every night at Millionaire Club in order to get by economically. After we had finished our coffees at the mall, she invited me to join Tiger and her to the club.

We were in Tiger's shining BMW on our way to Millionaire Club, when Vanesa passed me the cover of an album with Marian Mexicanu, a renowned accordion player. Tiger turned around, and explained that he himself, played keyboard in the recording. Mexicanu and Tiger had been playing together in Italy, in front of, "Berlusconi himself." Tiger explained, "The music is a mixture of Oriental, folk and jazz," and threw intense, inquisitive glances at me through the rear-view mirror, "Do you like it?" I affirmed. Vanesa and Tiger agreed that it was good that I was able to appreciate this kind of music. We parked outside of the club where a group of young men surrounded the open trunk of car, filled with jeans and sneakers. One of them who tried on a pair of shoes on the sidewalk, howled in our direction. Vanesa laughed and took my hand, "I know him, he is just joking, come on!" and led me into the club. When Vanesa had left us to enter the stage, Tiger told me, "I am not like her, I am a star. What she earns singing here every night, I earn by doing one concert per week. People are fascinated by instruments and not by song, when Berlusconi heard us he was absolutely amazed." At this point I could hear the echo of Vanesa's voice, "pentru prietena mea Saskia!" (for my friend Saskia!). "Saskia, Saskia," she repeated. I entered the room where the stage was located, and blushed while facing the curious looks of the audience. Although Vanesa seemed energetic up on stage, she came limping towards our table during the break, "I am so tired and my foot hurts," she complained, and removed one of the high-heeled shoes from her swollen foot. The concert continued and when it was passed midnight, I decided to

go home. Vanesa wanted to make sure that I got home safely, and, despite my protests, she interrupted the concert, and drove me home.

My conversation with Vanesa and Tiger shows that even some manelists dissociate themselves from manele. Tiger emphasized his musical capabilities by playing the Mexicanu album, and by comparing himself to Vanesa, whose songs he composed. Like my other informants, Tiger referred to the skills of the traditional *lăutari* as superior, and beyond the modern manele. The recurrent sentimental awe for the traditional, folkloric, and the authentic call for further discussion.

Authenticity and an Appealing Image

Traditional Romani music was highly appreciated among my Romanian middle class informants and was considered, as Daniel (a childhood friend of Florin) put it, “*very qualitative*,” which in turn reflects an ambivalent sentimental admiration for traditional ‘gypsy’ culture among Romanians. One evening in late February, an internationally renowned Romani *taraf*² came to Bucharest to hold a concert in an old industrial building. Felix and I, who shared a passion for music, had been exchanging playlists the precedent couple of weeks. During my first week in Bucharest, Felix had introduced me to Romanian folklore, and played a couple of songs recorded by the *taraf* that we were now going to see.

*A young painter, who was also exhibiting his artworks in the locale, was organizing the event. I came alone in a taxi, and met up with Marcel, Sarah, Felix and his German friend Gertrude. They were all admirers of the orchestra that would soon enter the stage. Before the concert we looked at the paintings that covered the walls, Sarah was ecstatic. The artist characterized them as, “Balkan expressionism with gypsy influence.” The motives were dark, young lovers with sailor tattoos, quite similar to the artist himself and his girlfriend who wore a belly dancing costume, leather jacket and red lipstick. Sometime during the concert I lost Sarah in the dancing crowd. After a few moments she came towards me, beaming with excitement. Sarah, who wrote articles for a student paper, had managed to book an interview with the artist. The *taraf* gave a mind-blowing concert that lasted for nearly four hours, and all of my companions were very impressed. I asked Sarah, whether she was interested in*

interviewing the musicians too. She answered me without hesitating: “No, I don’t think so. They are amazing and wild musicians but from a different world, we can’t communicate”.

The paintings of the young artist mediated a modern, urban, exotic and rather erotic image of ‘gypsy life’, which appealed to Sarah, while the rural musicians did not offer an image she could communicate with. Sarah identified the painter and his extravagant girlfriend, who danced in her glittery costume up on the stage, as ‘gypsies’: wild and fascinating, yet comprehensible. After the interview she lamented her discovery that neither the artist nor his girlfriend were ‘gypsies’, but simply Romanians.

Concluding Remarks

Throughout this chapter I have attempted to illustrate how my informants positioned themselves in relation to their objects for disdain. Further, I have aimed to create an understanding of these objects, manele and the *cocalari*, and why certain arenas, and people become particularly conflictual, in the perceptions of my informants. Contemporary manele music was rejected on the grounds of being vulgar, of idolizing wealth and for being too simple. This was contrasted by other contemporary genres such as hip hop, pop and rock, which are Western innovations and therefore also highly appreciated. *Cocalari*, were portrayed as uneducated people, without the means to dress or behave properly, thus the personification of the ‘uncivilized’. I have argued that the aversion towards *cocalari*, and manele are due to anxieties regarding a class order, wherein the emergence of a self-assured lower class citizen becomes anomalous to upper, and middle classes. The boasting Romanian, personified in the *cocalar*, does not fit in the established perception of Romanians as belonging to the lower levels of the ‘civilization ladder’.

I have also given the perspective of manelists, who appeared just as ambivalent in relation to the manele industry. From this viewpoint, manele was an answer to a Romanian demand for easygoing and danceable music. I have touched on the subject of authenticity, which was a distinct emblem for what was considered refined and good in the context, again in contrast to the *cocalari*, which are viewed as vulgar and fake. Although traditional Romani music was highly ranked, the interpretations of the young Romanian artist seemed to communicate a ‘gypsy life’ in more of an appealing and comprehensible manner than the rural *taraf*.

Concluding Reflections

In Bucharest I encountered several categories for differentiation in addition to the apparent ‘gypsy Other’. Throughout the thesis I have sought to understand these ‘Others’, in relation to the context wherein they kept reappearing. In Bucharest, categories for differentiation appeared essential to the social orientation, and quest for belonging, among my informants. I have therefore suggested that positioning in relation to ‘Others’ is a significant aspect of identity-making processes.

The unbounded and fragmented cityscape, and an ambiguous social context provided a fertile ground for contempt and hostility among inhabitants. I have sought to explain how the incoherent and politically disorganized structure of the city echoes remnants from the past, and frustrations towards the contemporary. Unsettled disputes over property, and the way houses are appropriated, appear to maintain an ambivalence concerning individual and social belonging among the city dwellers. The movements of the *fier vechi* cut across, and constituted connections between, various neighborhoods in the heterogeneous landscape, while the movements of the middle class youth sought to constitute an implicit boundary maintenance based on preference. Belonging was thereby also constituted in less of a discursive manner, through acts, stances, and by moving and dwelling in specific arenas of the city.

The ‘gypsy’ concept plays a vital role in the maintenance of a rather frail Romanian collective identity. Romanians would however express an up-front disdain, not only towards the gypsy ‘Other’ but also in relation to other Romanians. I have spoken of these chains of hostility in terms of a competition for positive identification. This, I have argued, mirrors an internal fragmentation and an absence of a positively loaded identification. Through exploring negative self-perception among Romanians, I have found that the negative characteristics that were commonly assigned to ‘gypsies’ appeared equally applicable to Romanians. These internal hierarchical orders also reflect identity characteristics that are established in a wider context, wherein Romanians subordinate themselves in relation to an idealized image of the West. Romanians would position themselves as the counter image of the ‘gypsy’, while seldom absorbing the positively loaded characteristics that they would ascribe to the Western. The tendency of self-contempt seemed just as commonsensical as the racism towards minorities.

The common denominator that cut across various definitions of ‘Others’, both inferior ones in terms of ‘gypsies’, and *cocalari*, but also the superior one represented by the West, was the frequent reference to ideas of ‘civilized’ and ‘uncivilized’. This dichotomy appeared in different settings and with regards to various phenomena. Positioning in relation to the ‘uncivilized’ would, for instance entail distancing oneself from rurality, certain types of music, and behaviors. Notions of ‘civilized’ and ‘uncivilized’ therefore served as navigators in identity-making processes, and were implemented by similarly positioned people to create a space where, internally to the group, positively loaded belonging emerged, while, negative portrayals of an ‘Other’ functioned to strengthen this sense of belonging.

An implicit hierarchy underlies these movements and positionings, which also, necessarily, become an outcome of the latter. This hierarchy, which I have been speaking of in terms of a Russian Matryoshka doll, emerges simultaneously and intertwined with ideas of ‘civilized’ and ‘uncivilized’. An unfortunate drawback of this division is clear, it serves to legitimize and reproduce racist views, further it requires that Romanians accept their own subordination in relation to Western ‘civilizations’. The acceptance of this inferiority, in turn, contributes to a negative self-perception and resentment among citizens. The tendency of applying the concepts ‘civilized’ and ‘uncivilized’ to ethnic groups, nation states, and individuals, can legitimize a reproduction of blame. Romanians are continuously blaming themselves, and ‘gypsies’ for bad traits and failures occurring in and outside of Romania. This destructive self-perception in combination with the idealization of Western countries may explain why many middle class informants sought to establish an affiliation with West European culture, and dreamt of leaving Romania.

Although it was not my initial intention, the course of events in the field drew my focus to the perspective of a privileged group in Romanian society. To “study up” may have its limitations, but I hold that a focus on discourses on ‘Others’ among the middle class, offers insights about power relations in the society in question. My method in the field was to grasp a set of recurring, and loaded topics among informants, a technique that is relevant for a number of reasons. Firstly, the repetitive nature of these matters reflects their importance to the social context. Secondly, it gives way for an exploration of this significance, which in turn brings about a broad set of data about the context. By studying the lives of the middle class youth, tensions between majority and minority, and between the urban and the rural, amongst other things, came to the fore.

Linking Localities

My curiosity towards Romania was induced by the migration of Romanian Roma to Oslo, and the commotion in the media following France's expulsions of Roma in August 2010. I am content to have chosen a point of departure on the basis of an experience in the society where I live, since my interest throughout this endeavor has been to explore a problematic phenomenon that crosses borders. The topic that this project sprung out from has therefore connected two localities, Oslo and Bucharest. Since I left Oslo to initiate the fieldwork in Bucharest the trail between Romania and Norway appears to have transformed into a beaten track. Sidewalks and parks are becoming temporary homes for Romanian Roma, and meanwhile distraught voices in Norwegian media exclaim, "gypsies eat dogs!" and, "they are using public spaces as toilets" (Svarstad, 2011). The presence of these beggars, of which Norwegians generally seem to have very little knowledge, appears to erase any critical analysis of the situation, and simultaneously a Norwegian version of the 'gypsy Other' is being established. This 'gypsy Other' does not differ particularly from the Romanian case, as eating dog for instance is a good example that defines a Norwegian idea of 'uncivilized'. Predominately rightwing politicians have proposed for a ban on begging, claiming that these groups are victims of organized trafficking. This claim is not based on a thorough investigation, however, which leads me to conclude that the suggestion is not incited by humanitarian engagement, but is rather a quick solution to an urban 'inconvenience', or a confused position towards a "matter out of place" (Douglas, 1997). My experience with rural and urban Roma in Romania, and in my neighborhood in Oslo, contradicts the trafficking version fully. The extended families I have been in contact with, in a village close to Sibiu, send off family members to beg in wealthier countries as part of a communal survival strategy, to supplement temporary farm work in fields owned by Romanians. The Roma dwelling in my neighborhood in Oslo also travel in family groups, and take turns to return with the surplus to their children in Romania. Begging in Norway is a harsh business, and not particularly profitable, but appears to be the only solution to an unbearable situation in Romania, where Roma are the last to take part in any kind of welfare. The migration is thereof simply an outcome of inequalities and poverty, which calls for a change of discourse regarding Roma in Norwegian, as well as European media and politics.

Although it has been impossible for me to entirely preclude tacit references to my own society throughout the thesis, my intention is to conclude with an explicit comparison, as I see

that positioning in relation to ‘Others’ is most certainly not a Romanian phenomenon. The constitution of the Romanian ‘Other’, or the *cocalari*, which I have accounted for in chapter five, may well be compared to similar tendencies in Norwegian society. The middle class has become more of a precarious category here too, but unlike Romania, this is due to an increasingly equal distribution of wealth. Bourdieu’s idea of scarcity, as a condition for the forcefulness of capital is based on an inflation logic (Bugge, 2002: 226). One may therefore assume that a decreased scarcity in economic capital enhances discursive strategies, or the maintenance of cultural capital to uphold class boundaries. I suggest that middle class is therefore largely maintained socially, where matters of taste and preference are significant tools. An example is the expansion of reality shows since the late nineties, where selected participants are seldom well educated, nor well-spoken individuals, in the conventional sense. At the university in Oslo, I have followed discussions about episodes of one of these shows, the *Paradise Hotel*. My fellow students speak of the participants in scornful manners, commenting on their “tacky” appearance, laughing at their mispronunciations, and faulty usage of proverbs. These shows seem to serve a similar purpose in Norwegian society as the web site *cocalari.com* does in Romania. Norwegians may not operate with notions of civilization to the same extent as Romanians, but they certainly express an urge for positioning in relation to ill mannered and ignorant ‘Others’.

Epilogue

Approximately a year after I initiated the fieldwork in Bucharest, video clips and photos from a crowded Piața Universității popped up on the Facebook logs of my Romanian contacts. The protest on January 13th 2012 was triggered by a controversy between Raed Arafat, vice interior minister and President Băsescu regarding plans of privatizing emergency health care. Arafat, who opposed the reforms, was accused by President Băsescu of being a leftist and a liar, which caused Arafat's immediate resignation (The Economist: 2012:16:01). Outraged by the incident, Romanians braved the cold weather, and took to the streets in protest. The initial demonstration crashed with a group of violent football hooligans, causing brutal collisions with the Romanian gendarme. Politicians and officials condemned the demonstration and referred to the crowds as “worms” and “violent and inept slum-dwellers” (Volintiru, 2012). The political condemnation, the redraw of the health bill, and minister Arafat's return did not subdue the agitation among students, employees and pensioners, who proceeded with their peaceful gatherings one evening after the other in cities all over Romania. So, what was then the actual cause for the protests? Leading persons in the movement called for a change in the political language, for increased transparency, and a greater involvement of citizens in decision making. It has also been claimed, that the degrading behavior of Romanian politicians, was the actual cause of the protests, that were not, principally, a crusade for greater prosperity. These protests, prompted the resignation of Prime Minister Emil Boc, and a former Foreign Intelligence Service Chief, Mr. Ungureanu took over as head of the same coalition. In April, Mr Ungureanu lost a vote of confidence over the austerity program, and President Băsescu, asked Centre-left Social Democratic Party leader Victor Ponta, to form a government.

The fragmentation that I have attempted to portray throughout the thesis appeared as a problem related to political alienation. Whatever the specific political outcomes will be, the mobilization that cut across generations, and various socioeconomic levels of Romanian society, hopefully, reflects a striving towards a widespread, and positively loaded sense of belonging in Romania.

Bibliography

Achim, Viorel (2004): *The Roma in Romanian History*. Budapest/New York: Central European University Press

Amin, Ash (2002): *Ethnicity and the Multicultural City. Living with Diversity*. Report for the Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions and the ESRC Cities Initiative

Anderson, Benedict (2006 <1983>): *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London/New York: Verso

Barth, Fredrik (1994): *Manifestasjon og process*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget AS

Bauman, Zygmunt (2002 <2001>): *Det individualiserade samhället*. Göteborg: Daidalos

Beissinger, Margaret H. (1991): *The Art of the Lautar. The Epic Tradition of Romania*. New York/London: Garland Publishing

Berger, Peter L, Luckmann, Thomas (2006 <1967>): *Den samfunnsskapte virkelighet*. Bergen: Fagbokforlaget

Boia, Lucian (2001a): *Romania. Borderland of Europe*. London: Reaktion Books Ltd.

Boia, Lucian (2001b): *History and Myth in Romanian Consciousness*. Budapest/New York: Central European University Press

Bourdieu, Pierre (2010 <1984>): *Distinction*. London/New York: Routledge

Bucica, Cristina (2000): *Legitimizing Power in Capital Cities. Bucharest - continuity through radical change?* -Ph.D. student, Department of Political Science / CÉLAT University Laval Québec

- Bugge, Lars (2002): *Pierre Bourdieus teori om makt*, in *Agora. Journal for metafysisk spekulasjon*, 20 (3-4) 2002 pp. 224-248. Oslo: Aschehoug
- Caldeira, P. R. Teresa (2000): *City of Walls. Crime, Segregation, and Citizenship in São Paulo*. Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press
- Douglas, Mary (1997 <1966>): *Rent og urent. En analyse av forestillinger omkring urenheter og tabu*. Oslo: Pax Forlag
- Engebrigtsen, I. Ada (2007): *Exploring Gypsiness. Power Exchange and Interdependence in a Transylvanian Village*. United States: Berghahn Books
- Eriksen, Hylland Thomas (2010 <1994>): *Ethnicity and Nationalism. Anthropological Perspectives*. London: Pluto Press
- Fangen, Katrine (2004): *Deltagende observasjon*. Bergen: Fagbokforlaget
- Fürst, Elisabeth L'orange (2009): *Hva skal vi med frihet? Fortellinger fra Moldova før, under og etter Sovjetunionen*. Oslo: Abstrakt forlag AS
- Gilman, Sander, L. (1986): *Jewish Self-Hatred. Anti-Semitism and the Hidden Language of the Jews*. United States: The John Hopkins University Press
- Jenkins, Richard (2005 <2004>): *Social Identity* (2d ed.) USA/Canada: Routledge
- Jenkins, Richard (2002): *Ch. 6: Imagined but Not Imaginary: Ethnicity and Nationalism in the Modern World* in (Red) MacClancy, Jeremy: *Exotic No More. Anthropology on the Front Lines* 2002, pp. 114-128. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press
- Miller, Daniel (2011): *Tales from Facebook*. UK/USA: Polity Press
- Massey, Doreen (2004): *Geographies of Responsibility* in *Geografiska Annaler*, 2004, 86 B

(1) pp. 5–18

Mîndruț, Petruța (2006): *Aerobics and Self-asserting Discourses: Mapping the Gendered Body in Post-socialist Romania*, in *Anthropology of East Europe Review*, Volume 24, No. 2, pp. 13-24

Mintz, Sidney W. (1979): *The Anthropological Interview and the Life History* in *Oral History Review*, 1979 pp. 18-26. Berkeley: University of California Press

Spradley, James P. (1979): *The Ethnographic Interview*. United States: Wadsworth Group/Thomas Learning

Stewart, Alex (1998): *The Ethnographer's Method*. United States: Sage Publications

Verdery, Katherine (1996): *What was Socialism and What Comes Next?* New Jersey: Princeton University Press

Verdery, Katherine (1993): *Nationalism and National Sentiment in Post-Socialist Romania*, in *Slavic Review*, Vol. 52, No. 2 (Summer 1993), pp. 179-203

Verdery, Katherine (1991): *National Ideology under Socialism: Identity and Culture Politics under Ceausescu's Romania*, Berkeley/Los Angeles: University of California Press

Verdery, Katherine (1990): *Theorizing Socialism: a prologue to the "transition"* in *American Ethnologist*, (1991) Volume: 18, Issue: 3, pp. 419-439

Web Pages and Electronic Media

Cocalari.com

Available at:

cocalari.com (accessed 01/05/2012)

Mahutga, Matthew, Stepan-Norris, Judith (2007): *Ideological Hegemony* in Blackwell Reference Online.

Available at:

http://www.blackwellreference.com/public/tocnode?id=g9781405124331_chunk_g978140512433115_ss1-9 (Accessed 01/03/2012)

Massey, Doreen: *Landscape/space/politics: an essay* (unnumbered article)

Available at:

<http://thefutureoflandscape.wordpress.com/landscapespacepolitics-an-essay/> (Accessed: 10/03/2012)

Schiop, Adi (2011): *Cum au îngropat elitele României maneleleA O poveste cu cocalari*, in *CriticAtac*.

Available at:

<http://www.criticatac.ro/3957/cum-au-ingropat-elitele-romaniei-manelele-o-poveste-cu-cocalari/> (Accessed 10/03/2012)

Svartstad, Jørgen (10. 05. 2011): *Denne måken skulle spises* in *Aftenposten*.

Available at:

<http://www.aftenposten.no/nyheter/iriks/article4247332.ece#.T7D3eb9Ma3A> (accessed 14/05/2012)

The Economist (2012.16.01): *Rioting in Romania. The Battle of Bucharest*.

Available at:

<http://www.economist.com/blogs/easternapproaches/2012/01/rioting-romania?page=9>

(Accessed 17/01/2012)

Volintiru, Clara (2012.20.03): *Romania's recent protests have become a social movement calling for the dignity of the people in the face of an unaccountable government.*

Available at:

<http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/euoppblog/2012/03/20/romania-protests/> (Accessed 15/05/2012)

